

LORE OF THE KINSFOLK

BOOK IX

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A nine-volume anthology edited and compiled by
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First Edition
MMXVII

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For my sons.

*Ac se maga geonga under his maéges scyld elne
geéode þá his ágen wæs glédum forgrunden.*

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Introduction

Lore of the Kinsfolk is a large anthology of literature that reflects the cultural soul and values of our “Germanic,” “Nordic,” and “Celtic” European ancestors. While these ethnic terms are broad and imprecise, they provide sufficient distinction for there exists within their spiritual nexus a markedly different *Weltanschauung* from those of other cultures.

But what is this world-view? What is the true nature of our forefathers, our folk? I take the position that the best way we can discover the answer is through direct experience of their works. Thanks to the availability of their primary sources, we may “hear” the voices of our ancestors once more in their songs, sagas, epics, and chronicles. In this way their histories return to life as their sentiments and wisdom are renewed and reawakened within our own lives.

Until the availability of this compilation, an anthology such as this was lacking. To understand why, let us look at the “Great Books” and “Western Canon.” Though sometimes pilloried as out-moded and archaic, these canonical selections are still taught in many universities and should be considered carefully with a mind to not only what is included, but also what is excluded. Specifically, what is the perspective of the scholar who chooses Adam Smith over Thomas Malory, *Paradise Lost* over the *Song of Roland*, and so on?

The perspective of such a scholar is not at all original, but instead extends tastes which have their origin in the 14th century with the Renaissance and its disparagement of what Petrarch called the “Dark Ages.” There are three chief roots to this mentality, which so displaced our indigenous one and now completely possesses the modern world: (1) the Black Plague which spread with trade and altered the appearance of the world from one of divine order to that of a grim lottery, (2) the “Little Ice Age” that collapsed the agriculture of the Medieval Warm Period, and (3) Levantine trading and lending practices spreading through Europe, especially as the *Reconquista* ended *al-Andalus*. Together these instilled abstracted, rationalistic materialism and erected an irreconcilable barrier between Nature and Self.

As I have argued in *Mysteries of the Obvious*, the penchant and skill of the Jewish people for cosmopolitan trade was formed in the survival strategies of the Near Eastern sociological and climatological milieu following desertification. This climate change was central to the fall of the previous agriculturally-rooted kingdoms of the Near East, as that fertile, orderly, and harmonious natural world was turned to chaos, plunging good and bad alike into the throes of misfortune.

During this time the hostility of natural forces outside of human control led many to a sense of alienation from life; a perception of divine order as either cruel, indifferent, or nonexistent; and a resulting cynical egoistical materialism. The resource scarcity encouraged competition and selfishness as short-term personal opportunism prevailed over long-term social good, practical strategies in a starving land filled with predatory raiders. When the Black Plague and climate change occurred in Europe, a similar shift in the perception of Nature followed, most especially in the cities where the links to Her spirit were already tenuous and it is indeed in the cities of northern Italy that we first see the resolve of the old European spirit crumble into ruin.

The Jewish merchants and moneylenders who entered Florence found their Gentile champions in the Medici family, who pro-

tested and encouraged the Jewish population and trade practices. The House of Medici, bankrolled by the Jewish moneylenders whose wealth greatly expanded in the Islamic “Golden Age,” became exceedingly rich and powerful. The Medici possessed the largest bank in Europe through the 15th century, sired three popes and many royals, and lent to avaricious royalty throughout Europe.

Jewish collaboration with Gentiles towards international corporatism or imperialism may be found earlier in Rome, among the Muslim Caliphates, onwards through Europe via the Renaissance and Enlightenment, and ongoing in this corrupt age of Modernity. The style of Jewish-Gentile partnership capitalizes on the respective strengths of Jewish financial acumen and legalism in conjunction with Gentile military and industrial power. Contrary to the rhetoric of simplistic anti-Semites, this situation is not due to manipulation or exploitation on the part of the Jews, but transparently achieves precisely what both collaborating parties want, namely power and wealth — of exaggerated importance in desperate times as with decaying Rome or plague-ridden Europe.

Though the oligarchs thereby advance, the congress of commercial enterprise is not without its casualties and detractors, and perhaps no values are truly more antithetical to it than those of our European ancestors. Our concepts of Honor and Love are entirely opposed to the peddler’s *ethos*; the basis of the former is Nature and the deep sense of belonging to Her, while that of the latter is a rationalistic abstraction of life and spirituality entirely away from our Earthly origin to an abstract conception of Universe and Self. These two world views are not simply different perspectives of the same truth, but two diametrically opposed directions of the soul to or away from the real, living natural world.

Chivalry cannot abide Capitalism, nor the contrary. To defeat the obstacle posed to trade, the merchant must disarm the knight; neuter the old concepts of masculinity and femininity; replace “person” with “consumer;” mock sacrifice, loyalty, and honor; and endlessly advertise the Self over the Folk, that is, the individual over their larger sense of belonging within Nature.

Thus it is was that Petrarch, the Tuscan father of Renaissance, was to first describe the previous era as the “Dark Age” (i.e. *saeculum obscurum*), elevating the Greeks and Romans of antiquity while debasing the European successors as ignorant primitives. The Renaissance is the reaction that he and other Northern Italians, informed by cynicism derived of pestilence and famine, initially fashioned in choosing the glittering ephemerality of wealthy and decadent past empires over the ancestral European outlook. While the ancestral outlook could be characterized as ultimately based on the intimate faith in Nature’s inherent goodness and correctness (i.e. the harmonious expression of the divine in the Middle World), the future mentality was utterly aloof from such pedestrianly mundane notions of God, Soul, and Nature.

The New Man of commerce, technology, and imperialism would spread the inticements of the Jews and their imitative collaborators into Belgium, Amsterdam, England, and throughout Europe, promoting his cosmopolitan oligarchical *ethos* everywhere he went. Fresh imperialism caught on fire, profitable colonies were established overseas, ruthless slavery came back into vogue, the cruel Jehovah replaced the compassionate Christ — and subsequently was entirely displaced with Spinoza, Hobbes, Diderot, *et al* — and thereafter all “enlightened” people only

looked with embarrassment and contempt upon those ridiculous old views of the past.

And, so it is that conventional scholars ever since may find Shakespeare's street-smart wit or Cervantes' satirical mocking palatable, but reject the Matter of Britain as unworthy of canonical inclusion. Mortimer J. Alder's famed *Great Books of the Western World* well demonstrates this myopia. After eighteen massive volumes of classical works, not a single piece is included from the eight hundred years spanning Augustine to Aquinas! The modern corruption of value is so great that hundreds of pages of pointless astronomical tables from Kepler and Copernicus are included, but not a paragraph of the Nordic Sagas. And, why but because science and technology are so exceptionally valued in our present society — not due to an innate love of Natural Philosophy or Natural History, but because of their singular utility to commercial advantage!

Some have cast this conflict as a theological one, positing that the Church stifled creativity and imagination prior to the Renaissance. This belief reveals a tremendous myth in the historical understanding of the Christian religion, one that the religion's defenders and detractors both like to perpetuate: that the Christian religion of the Middle Ages is the same slavish, biblical creed as that of today, ignoring the hidden truth of the Reformation. In actuality, the historical Christianity of our ancestors was far more a reflection and furtherance of their own inherent nature than the supposed alien imposition of a Jewish sect.

To understand this, let us consider some facts. Once Imperial Rome had sufficiently weakened due to their own decadence and overreaching dilution, our kinsmen, the Visigoths, sacked Rome and German law, as with the *Visigothic Code*, replaced Roman law over the Western stretches of the former Roman Empire. Unlike the Roman subjects of Constantine *et al*, Christianity was not imposed on the ruling tribes or their kinsmen, but voluntarily adopted over time by the Northern peoples.

Why did Christianity appeal to them? Christianity was, from the beginning, a highly accessible and universal theological system formed from a mosaic of other beliefs including Roman paganism, Mithraism, Stoicism, and Buddhism. Until the dogmatism of the philo-Semitic Puritans and their restoration of Old Testament legalism, Christianity in practice was largely a matter of adopting what most resonated with the believer as variously realized from sect to sect, people to people. Our ancestors could see the strong similarities in the astro-theological underpinnings of Christianity to their heathen systems which had thousands of years travelled with them in their migration from the winnowing agricultural lands of the Near East. Free to adapt Christianity as they wished, they accepted and encouraged what they found interesting, useful, and true, while simultaneously preserving their own beliefs and practices. This was very much like the Roman's espousal of Greek mythology, and they were free to fit the religion to the mold they wished so that it was additive to, rather than subtractive from their own extant philosophies.

This adaption occurred in just the same manner as when the Franks adopted and shaped the Latin language into what we now know as French. Valuing Latin's vocabulary, grammar, literature, and wide usage, the Franks, Burgundians, *et al* repurposed the Roman's language for their own expressive goals, preserving Germanic linguistic traits but, more importantly, the overall personality of their own folk. Thus, Christianity through the Middle Ages, while not a Germanic invention, was a Germanic (and Celtic) *adaptation* of a flexible, complex religion into their own existing spiritual frameworks, from the Yggdrasil tree of salvation to the Celtic Cross.

A tremendous example of this is given us by the *Heliand*, the Saxon gospel of the 9th century. After the tyrannical behavior of Charlemagne towards the Saxons, a different approach by the Frankish Christians was used to convert the remaining pagans. Radically dissimilar from the conventional gospels of Mathew, Mark, Luke, and John, the Saxon gospel has a great many divergences from the traditional story of Jesus, portraying him and his Apostles as honorable and brave warriors. Jesus himself is shown as a heroic warrior chief imbued with pagan magical ability, his story a strong fusion of Germanic and early Christian *mythoi*.

As with Christianity, the ideas of our ancestors being generally brutish and cruel, predisposed to early deaths, and acutely scientifically ignorant are wholly in error. Fortunately, this older view of medievalism, so widely propagated by the Renaissance and its followers, has been undergoing a significant revisionism at the hands of some academics. This began with the Romantics, themselves a reaction to the inhumanity of modernity and industrialism, many of whom embraced the spirit of the past and sought to continue its traditions into their own time.

In fact, the true nature of our ancestral character is shown by its honorableness, compassion, piety, idealism, humaneness, and vigor. As such, it reflects the best aspects of the continued soul of our European folk. For the truth is that the so-called "Dark Ages" were really the *Living Ages*, as every interaction was with an intelligent, organismic entity and perceived as within a like-wise Holism. Whereas commercial and, now, mechanical interactions have robbed life of its natural depth, our past kinsfolk lived fully amidst its inherent living complexity. For our ancestors, all of the world was an orderly, living organism, interdependent and related; all the world was a manifestation of the living nature god-head.

The Greeks and Romans were both peoples originally from the North, both spoke Indo-European languages, and both had many cultural traits familiar to our own. This connection is particularly evident with the Romans, and it was a difficult decision to omit works by the Romans, including Virgil's *Aeneid*, Plutarch's *Lives*, the especially insightful works by Julius Caesar and Tacitus on Gaul and Germania, and so on. Likewise, there are strong relations to be found in Slavic literature and such Eastern European history as Nestor's *Tales of Past Years*, but a choice was made to specifically feature the continuous inner path of the Western and Northern Europeans, in no small part because the *Lore* already exceeds 5,000,000 words. Perhaps these deficiencies and others will be remedied in future editions.

The fundamental nature of reality and our own spiritual instincts remain the same as when our ancestors wrote the works that follow. All that has really changed are the form and pervasiveness of the illusions and confutations we face. We can find inspiration in the like-minded revival of the old truths by certain Romantics, several of whom are included in the latter sections of the *Lore* for the beauty and authenticity of their continuations. These recent ancestors remind us that we can today still listen to and learn from the wisdom of our ancient kinsmen, and thereby rekindle within our hearts the truth of our blood, our world, and our soul.

Not only *can* we do this, but this what we *must* do! For it is the path back to reality, back to truth, and back to Nature in all of Her beautiful splendor. The works in the *Lore* are not merely historical relics; they are a sacred heirloom which has been passed to you so that you may live as accords your natural being. Listen to the *Lore of the Kinsfolk* and hear in the spirits of your ancestors your own living nature. And for you who hearken to the call of your forefathers, may their words cause your heart and mind to follow the wisdom of heroes over the wending path of time and fate.

— D.S. Blais, Vinland, December 2017

Tennyson: Idylls of the King

The Coming of Arthur

Leodogran, the King of Cameliard,
Had one fair daughter, and none other child;
And she was the fairest of all flesh on earth,
Guinevere, and in her his one delight.

For many a petty king ere Arthur came
Ruled in this isle, and ever waging war
Each upon other, wasted all the land;
And still from time to time the heathen host
Swarmed overseas, and harried what was left.
And so there grew great tracts of wilderness,
Wherein the beast was ever more and more,
But man was less and less, till Arthur came.
For first Aurelius lived and fought and died,
And after him King Uther fought and died,
But either failed to make the kingdom one.
And after these King Arthur for a space,
And through the puissance of his Table Round,
Drew all their petty princedoms under him.
Their king and head, and made a realm, and reigned.

And thus the land of Cameliard was waste,
Thick with wet woods, and many a beast therein,
And none or few to scare or chase the beast;
So that wild dog, and wolf and boar and bear
Came night and day, and rooted in the fields,
And wallowed in the gardens of the King.
And ever and anon the wolf would steal
The children and devour, but now and then,
Her own brood lost or dead, lent her fierce teat
To human sucklings; and the children, housed
In her foul den, there at their meat would growl,
And mock their foster mother on four feet,
Till, straightened, they grew up to wolf-like men,
Worse than the wolves. And King Leodogran
Groaned for the Roman legions here again,
And Caesar's eagle: then his brother king,
Urien, assailed him: last a heathen horde,
Reddening the sun with smoke and earth with blood,
And on the spike that split the mother's heart
Spitting the child, brake on him, till, amazed,
He knew not whither he should turn for aid.
But—for he heard of Arthur newly crowned,

Though not without an uproar made by those
Who cried, 'He is not Uther's son'—the King
Sent to him, saying, 'Arise, and help us thou!
For here between the man and beast we die.'

And Arthur yet had done no deed of arms,
But heard the call, and came: and Guinevere
Stood by the castle walls to watch him pass;
But since he neither wore on helm or shield
The golden symbol of his kinglihood,
But rode a simple knight among his knights,
And many of these in richer arms than he,
She saw him not, or marked not, if she saw,
One among many, though his face was bare.
But Arthur, looking downward as he past,
Felt the light of her eyes into his life
Smite on the sudden, yet rode on, and pitched
His tents beside the forest. Then he drave
The heathen; after, slew the beast, and felled
The forest, letting in the sun, and made
Broad pathways for the hunter and the knight
And so returned.

For while he lingered there,
A doubt that ever smouldered in the hearts
Of those great Lords and Barons of his realm
Flashed forth and into war: for most of these,
Colleaguings with a score of petty kings,
Made head against him, crying, 'Who is he
That he should rule us? who hath proven him
King Uther's son? for lo! we look at him,
And find nor face nor bearing, limbs nor voice,
Are like to those of Uther whom we knew.
This is the son of Gorlois, not the King;
This is the son of Anton, not the King.'

And Arthur, passing thence to battle, felt
Travail, and throes and agonies of the life,
Desiring to be joined with Guinevere;
And thinking as he rode, 'Her father said
That there between the man and beast they die.
Shall I not lift her from this land of beasts
Up to my throne, and side by side with me?
What happiness to reign a lonely king,
Vext—O ye stars that shudder over me,
O earth that soundest hollow under me,
Vext with waste dreams? for saving I be joined
To her that is the fairest under heaven,
I seem as nothing in the mighty world,
And cannot will my will, nor work my work
Wholly, nor make myself in mine own realm
Victor and lord. But were I joined with her,
Then might we live together as one life,
And reigning with one will in everything
Have power on this dark land to lighten it,
And power on this dead world to make it live.'
Thereafter—as he speaks who tells the tale—

When Arthur reached a field-of-battle bright
With pitched pavilions of his foe, the world
Was all so clear about him, that he saw
The smallest rock far on the faintest hill,
And even in high day the morning star.
So when the King had set his banner broad,
At once from either side, with trumpet-blast,
And shouts, and clarions shrilling unto blood,
The long-lanced battle let their horses run.
And now the Barons and the kings prevailed,
And now the King, as here and there that war
Went swaying; but the Powers who walk the world
Made lightnings and great thunders over him,
And dazed all eyes, till Arthur by main might,
And mightier of his hands with every blow,
And leading all his knighthood threw the kings
Carados, Urien, Cradlemont of Wales,
Claudias, and Clariance of Northumberland,
The King Brandagoras of Latangor,
With Anguisant of Erin, Morganore,
And Lot of Orkney. Then, before a voice
As dreadful as the shout of one who sees
To one who sins, and deems himself alone
And all the world asleep, they swerved and brake
Flying, and Arthur called to stay the brands
That hacked among the flyers, 'Ho! they yield!'
So like a painted battle the war stood
Silenced, the living quiet as the dead,
And in the heart of Arthur joy was lord.
He laughed upon his warrior whom he loved
And honoured most. 'Thou dost not doubt me King,
So well thine arm hath wrought for me today.'
'Sir and my liege,' he cried, 'the fire of God
Descends upon thee in the battle-field:
I know thee for my King!' Whereat the two,
For each had warded either in the fight,
Sware on the field of death a deathless love.
And Arthur said, 'Man's word is God in man:
Let chance what will, I trust thee to the death.'
Then quickly from the foughen field he sent
Ulfius, and Brastias, and Bedivere,
His new-made knights, to King Leodogran,
Saying, 'If I in aught have served thee well,
Give me thy daughter Guinevere to wife.'
Whom when he heard, Leodogran in heart
Debating—'How should I that am a king,
However much he help me at my need,
Give my one daughter saving to a king,
And a king's son?'—lifted his voice, and called
A hoary man, his chamberlain, to whom
He trusted all things, and of him required
His counsel: 'Knowest thou aught of Arthur's birth?'
Then spake the hoary chamberlain and said,
'Sir King, there be but two old men that know:

And each is twice as old as I; and one
Is Merlin, the wise man that ever served
King Uther through his magic art; and one
Is Merlin's master (so they call him) Bleys,
Who taught him magic, but the scholar ran
Before the master, and so far, that Bleys,
Laid magic by, and sat him down, and wrote
All things and whatsoever Merlin did
In one great annal-book, where after-years
Will learn the secret of our Arthur's birth.'

To whom the King Leodogran replied,
'O friend, had I been holpen half as well
By this King Arthur as by thee today,
Then beast and man had had their share of me:
But summon here before us yet once more
Ulfius, and Brastias, and Bedivere.'

Then, when they came before him, the King said,
'I have seen the cuckoo chased by lesser fowl,
And reason in the chase: but wherefore now
Do these your lords stir up the heat of war,
Some calling Arthur born of Gorlois,
Others of Anton? Tell me, ye yourselves,
Hold ye this Arthur for King Uther's son?'

And Ulfius and Brastias answered, 'Ay.'
Then Bedivere, the first of all his knights
Knighted by Arthur at his crowning, spake—
For bold in heart and act and word was he,
Whenever slander breathed against the King—
'Sir, there be many rumours on this head:
For there be those who hate him in their hearts,
Call him baseborn, and since his ways are sweet,
And theirs are bestial, hold him less than man:
And there be those who deem him more than man,
And dream he dropt from heaven: but my belief
In all this matter—so ye care to learn—
Sir, for ye know that in King Uther's time
The prince and warrior Gorlois, he that held
Tintagil castle by the Cornish sea,
Was wedded with a winsome wife, Ygerne:
And daughters had she borne him,—one whereof,
Lot's wife, the Queen of Orkney, Bellicent,
Hath ever like a loyal sister cleaved
To Arthur,—but a son she had not borne.
And Uther cast upon her eyes of love:
But she, a stainless wife to Gorlois,
So loathed the bright dishonour of his love,
That Gorlois and King Uther went to war:
And overthrown was Gorlois and slain.
Then Uther in his wrath and heat besieged
Ygerne within Tintagil, where her men,
Seeing the mighty swarm about their walls,
Left her and fled, and Uther entered in,
And there was none to call to but himself.
So, compassed by the power of the King,

Enforced was she to wed him in her tears,
And with a shameful swiftness: afterward,
Not many moons, King Uther died himself,
Moaning and wailing for an heir to rule
After him, lest the realm should go to wrack.
And that same night, the night of the new year,
By reason of the bitterness and grief
That vexed his mother, all before his time
Was Arthur born, and all as soon as born
Delivered at a secret postern-gate
To Merlin, to be holden far apart
Until his hour should come; because the lords
Of that fierce day were as the lords of this,
Wild beasts, and surely would have torn the child
Piecemeal among them, had they known; for each
But sought to rule for his own self and hand,
And many hated Uther for the sake
Of Gorlois. Wherefore Merlin took the child,
And gave him to Sir Anton, an old knight
And ancient friend of Uther; and his wife
Nursed the young prince, and reared him with her own;
And no man knew. And ever since the lords
Have foughten like wild beasts among themselves,
So that the realm has gone to wrack: but now,
This year, when Merlin (for his hour had come)
Brought Arthur forth, and set him in the hall,
Proclaiming, "Here is Uther's heir, your king,"
A hundred voices cried, "Away with him!
No king of ours! a son of Gorlois he,
Or else the child of Anton, and no king,
Or else baseborn." Yet Merlin through his craft,
And while the people clamoured for a king,
Had Arthur crowned; but after, the great lords
Banded, and so brake out in open war.
Then while the King debated with himself
If Arthur were the child of shamefulness,
Or born the son of Gorlois, after death,
Or Uther's son, and born before his time,
Or whether there were truth in anything
Said by these three, there came to Cameliard,
With Gawain and young Modred, her two sons,
Lot's wife, the Queen of Orkney, Bellicent;
Whom as he could, not as he would, the King
Made feast for, saying, as they sat at meat,
'A doubtful throne is ice on summer seas.
Ye come from Arthur's court. Victor his men
Report him! Yea, but ye—think ye this king—
So many those that hate him, and so strong,
So few his knights, however brave they be—
Hath body enow to hold his foemen down?'
'O King,' she cried, 'and I will tell thee: few,
Few, but all brave, all of one mind with him;
For I was near him when the savage yells
Of Uther's peerage died, and Arthur sat

Crowned on the dais, and his warriors cried,
"Be thou the king, and we will work thy will
Who love thee." Then the King in low deep tones,
And simple words of great authority,
Bound them by so strait vows to his own self,
That when they rose, knighted from kneeling, some
Were pale as at the passing of a ghost,
Some flushed, and others dazed, as one who wakes
Half-blinded at the coming of a light.

'But when he spake and cheered his Table Round
With large, divine, and comfortable words,
Beyond my tongue to tell thee—I beheld
From eye to eye through all their Order flash
A momentary likeness of the King:
And ere it left their faces, through the cross
And those around it and the Crucified,
Down from the casement over Arthur, smote
Flame-colour, vert and azure, in three rays,
One falling upon each of three fair queens,
Who stood in silence near his throne, the friends
Of Arthur, gazing on him, tall, with bright
Sweet faces, who will help him at his need.

'And there I saw mage Merlin, whose vast wit
And hundred winters are but as the hands
Of loyal vassals toiling for their liege.

'And near him stood the Lady of the Lake,
Who knows a subtler magic than his own—
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful.
She gave the King his huge cross-hilted sword,
Whereby to drive the heathen out: a mist
Of incense curled about her, and her face
Wellnigh was hidden in the minster gloom;
But there was heard among the holy hymns
A voice as of the waters, for she dwells
Down in a deep; calm, whatsoever storms
May shake the world, and when the surface rolls,
Hath power to walk the waters like our Lord.

'There likewise I beheld Excalibur
Before him at his crowning borne, the sword
That rose from out the bosom of the lake,
And Arthur rowed across and took it—rich
With jewels, elfin Urim, on the hilt,
Bewildering heart and eye—the blade so bright
That men are blinded by it—on one side,
Graven in the oldest tongue of all this world,
"Take me," but turn the blade and ye shall see,
And written in the speech ye speak yourself,
"Cast me away!" And sad was Arthur's face
Taking it, but old Merlin counselled him,
"Take thou and strike! the time to cast away
Is yet far-off." So this great brand the king
Took, and by this will beat his foemen down.'
Thereat Leodogran rejoiced, but thought
To sift his doubtings to the last, and asked,

Fixing full eyes of question on her face,
'The swallow and the swift are near akin,
But thou art closer to this noble prince,
Being his own dear sister;' and she said,
'Daughter of Gorlois and Ygerne am I;
'And therefore Arthur's sister?' asked the King.
She answered, 'These be secret things,' and signed
To those two sons to pass, and let them be.
And Gawain went, and breaking into song
Sprang out, and followed by his flying hair
Ran like a colt, and leapt at all he saw:
But Modred laid his ear beside the doors,
And there half-heard; the same that afterward
Struck for the throne, and striking found his doom.

And then the Queen made answer, 'What know I?
For dark my mother was in eyes and hair,
And dark in hair and eyes am I; and dark
Was Gorlois, yea and dark was Uther too,
Wellnigh to blackness; but this King is fair
Beyond the race of Britons and of men.
Moreover, always in my mind I hear
A cry from out the dawning of my life,
A mother weeping, and I hear her say,
"O that ye had some brother, pretty one,
To guard thee on the rough ways of the world."
'Ay,' said the King, 'and hear ye such a cry?
But when did Arthur chance upon thee first?'
'O King!' she cried, 'and I will tell thee true:
He found me first when yet a little maid:
Beaten I had been for a little fault
Whereof I was not guilty; and out I ran
And flung myself down on a bank of heath,
And hated this fair world and all therein,
And wept, and wished that I were dead; and he—
I know not whether of himself he came,
Or brought by Merlin, who, they say, can walk
Unseen at pleasure—he was at my side,
And spake sweet words, and comforted my heart,
And dried my tears, being a child with me.
And many a time he came, and evermore
As I grew greater grew with me; and sad
At times he seemed, and sad with him was I,
Stern too at times, and then I loved him not,
But sweet again, and then I loved him well.
And now of late I see him less and less,
But those first days had golden hours for me,
For then I surely thought he would be king.

'But let me tell thee now another tale:
For Bleys, our Merlin's master, as they say,
Died but of late, and sent his cry to me,
To hear him speak before he left his life.
Shrunk like a fairy changeling lay the mage;
And when I entered told me that himself
And Merlin ever served about the King,

Uther, before he died; and on the night
 When Uther in Tintagil past away
 Moaning and wailing for an heir, the two
 Left the still King, and passing forth to breathe,
 Then from the castle gateway by the chasm
 Descending through the dismal night—a night
 In which the bounds of heaven and earth were lost—
 Beheld, so high upon the dreary deeps
 It seemed in heaven, a ship, the shape thereof
 A dragon winged, and all from stern to stern
 Bright with a shining people on the decks,
 And gone as soon as seen. And then the two
 Dropt to the cove, and watched the great sea fall,
 Wave after wave, each mightier than the last,
 Till last, a ninth one, gathering half the deep
 And full of voices, slowly rose and plunged
 Roaring, and all the wave was in a flame:
 And down the wave and in the flame was borne
 A naked babe, and rode to Merlin's feet,
 Who stoopt and caught the babe, and cried "The King!
 Here is an heir for Uther!" And the fringe
 Of that great breaker, sweeping up the strand,
 Lashed at the wizard as he spake the word,
 And all at once all round him rose in fire,
 So that the child and he were clothed in fire.
 And presently thereafter followed calm,
 Free sky and stars: "And this the same child," he said,
 "Is he who reigns; nor could I part in peace
 Till this were told." And saying this the seer
 Went through the strait and dreadful pass of death,
 Not ever to be questioned any more
 Save on the further side; but when I met
 Merlin, and asked him if these things were truth—
 The shining dragon and the naked child
 Descending in the glory of the seas—
 He laughed as is his wont, and answered me
 In riddling triplets of old time, and said:
 "Rain, rain, and sun! a rainbow in the sky!
 A young man will be wiser by and by;
 An old man's wit may wander ere he die.
 Rain, rain, and sun! a rainbow on the lea!
 And truth is this to me, and that to thee;
 And truth or clothed or naked let it be.
 Rain, sun, and rain! and the free blossom blows:
 Sun, rain, and sun! and where is he who knows?
 From the great deep to the great deep he goes."
 'So Merlin riddling angered me; but thou
 Fear not to give this King thy only child,
 Guinevere: so great bards of him will sing
 Hereafter; and dark sayings from of old
 Ranging and ringing through the minds of men,
 And echoed by old folk beside their fires
 For comfort after their wage-work is done,
 Speak of the King; and Merlin in our time

Hath spoken also, not in jest, and sworn
Though men may wound him that he will not die,
But pass, again to come; and then or now
Utterly smite the heathen underfoot,
Till these and all men hail him for their king.’

She spake and King Leodogran rejoiced,
But musing, ‘Shall I answer yea or nay?’
Doubted, and drowsed, nodded and slept, and saw,
Dreaming, a slope of land that ever grew,
Field after field, up to a height, the peak
Haze-hidden, and thereon a phantom king,
Now looming, and now lost; and on the slope
The sword rose, the hind fell, the herd was driven,
Fire glimpsed; and all the land from roof and rick,
In drifts of smoke before a rolling wind,
Streamed to the peak, and mingled with the haze
And made it thicker; while the phantom king
Sent out at times a voice; and here or there
Stood one who pointed toward the voice, the rest
Slew on and burnt, crying, ‘No king of ours,
No son of Uther, and no king of ours;’
Till with a wink his dream was changed, the haze
Descended, and the solid earth became
As nothing, but the King stood out in heaven,
Crowned. And Leodogran awoke, and sent
Ulfius, and Brastias and Bedivere,
Back to the court of Arthur answering yea.

Then Arthur charged his warrior whom he loved
And honoured most, Sir Lancelot, to ride forth
And bring the Queen;—and watched him from the gates:
And Lancelot past away among the flowers,
(For then was latter April) and returned
Among the flowers, in May, with Guinevere.
To whom arrived, by Dubric the high saint,
Chief of the church in Britain, and before
The stateliest of her altar-shrines, the King
That morn was married, while in stainless white,
The fair beginners of a nobler time,
And glorying in their vows and him, his knights
Stood around him, and rejoicing in his joy.
Far shone the fields of May through open door,
The sacred altar blossomed white with May,
The Sun of May descended on their King,
They gazed on all earth’s beauty in their Queen,
Rolled incense, and there past along the hymns
A voice as of the waters, while the two
Swore at the shrine of Christ a deathless love:
And Arthur said, ‘Behold, thy doom is mine.
Let chance what will, I love thee to the death!’
To whom the Queen replied with drooping eyes,
‘King and my lord, I love thee to the death!’
And holy Dubric spread his hands and spake,
‘Reign ye, and live and love, and make the world
Other, and may thy Queen be one with thee,

And all this Order of thy Table Round
 Fulfil the boundless purpose of their King!’
 So Dubric said; but when they left the shrine
 Great Lords from Rome before the portal stood,
 In scornful stillness gazing as they past;
 Then while they paced a city all on fire
 With sun and cloth of gold, the trumpets blew,
 And Arthur’s knighthood sang before the King:—
 ‘Blow, trumpet, for the world is white with May;
 Blow trumpet, the long night hath rolled away!
 Blow through the living world—“Let the King reign.”
 ‘Shall Rome or Heathen rule in Arthur’s realm?
 Flash brand and lance, fall battleaxe upon helm,
 Fall battleaxe, and flash brand! Let the King reign.
 ‘Strike for the King and live! his knights have heard
 That God hath told the King a secret word.
 Fall battleaxe, and flash brand! Let the King reign.
 ‘Blow trumpet! he will lift us from the dust.
 Blow trumpet! live the strength and die the lust!
 Clang battleaxe, and clash brand! Let the King reign.
 ‘Strike for the King and die! and if thou diest,
 The King is King, and ever wills the highest.
 Clang battleaxe, and clash brand! Let the King reign.
 ‘Blow, for our Sun is mighty in his May!
 Blow, for our Sun is mightier day by day!
 Clang battleaxe, and clash brand! Let the King reign.
 ‘The King will follow Christ, and we the King
 In whom high God hath breathed a secret thing.
 Fall battleaxe, and flash brand! Let the King reign.’
 So sang the knighthood, moving to their hall.
 There at the banquet those great Lords from Rome,
 The slowly-fading mistress of the world,
 Strode in, and claimed their tribute as of yore.
 But Arthur spake, ‘Behold, for these have sworn
 To wage my wars, and worship me their King;
 The old order changeth, yielding place to new;
 And we that fight for our fair father Christ,
 Seeing that ye be grown too weak and old
 To drive the heathen from your Roman wall,
 No tribute will we pay:’ so those great lords
 Drew back in wrath, and Arthur strove with Rome.
 And Arthur and his knighthood for a space
 Were all one will, and through that strength the King
 Drew in the petty pryncedoms under him,
 Fought, and in twelve great battles overcame
 The heathen hordes, and made a realm and reigned.

Gareth and Lynette

The last tall son of Lot and Bellicent,
 And tallest, Gareth, in a showerful spring
 Stared at the spate. A slender-shafted Pine
 Lost footing, fell, and so was whirled away.

'How he went down,' said Gareth, 'as a false knight
Or evil king before my lance if lance
Were mine to use—O senseless cataract,
Bearing all down in thy precipitancy—
And yet thou art but swollen with cold snows
And mine is living blood: thou dost His will,
The Maker's, and not knowest, and I that know,
Have strength and wit, in my good mother's hall
Linger with vacillating obedience,
Prisoned, and kept and coaxed and whistled to—
Since the good mother holds me still a child!
Good mother is bad mother unto me!
A worse were better; yet no worse would I.
Heaven yield her for it, but in me put force
To weary her ears with one continuous prayer,
Until she let me fly discased to sweep
In ever-highering eagle-circles up
To the great Sun of Glory, and thence swoop
Down upon all things base, and dash them dead,
A knight of Arthur, working out his will,
To cleanse the world. Why, Gawain, when he came
With Modred hither in the summertime,
Asked me to tilt with him, the proven knight.
Modred for want of worthier was the judge.
Then I so shook him in the saddle, he said,
"Thou hast half prevailed against me," said so—he—
Though Modred biting his thin lips was mute,
For he is alway sullen: what care I?'

And Gareth went, and hovering round her chair
Asked, 'Mother, though ye count me still the child,
Sweet mother, do ye love the child?' She laughed,
'Thou art but a wild-goose to question it.'
'Then, mother, an ye love the child,' he said,
'Being a goose and rather tame than wild,
Hear the child's story.' 'Yea, my well-beloved,
An 'twere but of the goose and golden eggs.'

And Gareth answered her with kindling eyes,
'Nay, nay, good mother, but this egg of mine
Was finer gold than any goose can lay;
For this an Eagle, a royal Eagle, laid
Almost beyond eye-reach, on such a palm
As glitters gilded in thy Book of Hours.
And there was ever haunting round the palm
A lusty youth, but poor, who often saw
The splendour sparkling from aloft, and thought
"An I could climb and lay my hand upon it,
Then were I wealthier than a leash of kings."
But ever when he reached a hand to climb,
One, that had loved him from his childhood, caught
And stayed him, "Climb not lest thou break thy neck,
I charge thee by my love," and so the boy,
Sweet mother, neither clomb, nor brake his neck,
But brake his very heart in pining for it,
And past away.'

To whom the mother said,
'True love, sweet son, had risked himself and climbed,
And handed down the golden treasure to him.'

And Gareth answered her with kindling eyes,
'Gold?' said I gold?—ay then, why he, or she,
Or whosoe'er it was, or half the world
Had ventured—had the thing I spake of been
Mere gold—but this was all of that true steel,
Whereof they forged the brand Excalibur,
And lightnings played about it in the storm,
And all the little fowl were flurried at it,
And there were cries and clashings in the nest,
That sent him from his senses: let me go.'

Then Bellicent bemoaned herself and said,
'Hast thou no pity upon my loneliness?
Lo, where thy father Lot beside the hearth
Lies like a log, and all but smouldered out!
For ever since when traitor to the King
He fought against him in the Barons' war,
And Arthur gave him back his territory,
His age hath slowly droopt, and now lies there
A yet-warm corpse, and yet unburialable,
No more; nor sees, nor hears, nor speaks, nor knows.
And both thy brethren are in Arthur's hall,
Albeit neither loved with that full love
I feel for thee, nor worthy such a love:
Stay therefore thou; red berries charm the bird,
And thee, mine innocent, the jousts, the wars,
Who never knewest finger-ache, nor pang
Of wrenched or broken limb—an often chance
In those brain-stunning shocks, and tourney-falls,
Frights to my heart; but stay: follow the deer
By these tall firs and our fast-falling burns;
So make thy manhood mightier day by day;
Sweet is the chase: and I will seek thee out
Some comfortable bride and fair, to grace
Thy climbing life, and cherish my prone year,
Till falling into Lot's forgetfulness
I know not thee, myself, nor anything.
Stay, my best son! ye are yet more boy than man.'

Then Gareth, 'An ye hold me yet for child,
Hear yet once more the story of the child.
For, mother, there was once a King, like ours.
The prince his heir, when tall and marriageable,
Asked for a bride; and thereupon the King
Set two before him. One was fair, strong, armed—
But to be won by force—and many men
Desired her; one good lack, no man desired.
And these were the conditions of the King:
That save he won the first by force, he needs
Must wed that other, whom no man desired,
A red-faced bride who knew herself so vile,
That evermore she longed to hide herself,
Nor fronted man or woman, eye to eye—

Yea—some she cleaved to, but they died of her.
And one—they called her Fame; and one,—O Mother,
How can ye keep me tethered to you—Shame.
Man am I grown, a man's work must I do.
Follow the deer? follow the Christ, the King,
Live pure, speak true, right wrong, follow the King—
Else, wherefore born?’

To whom the mother said
‘Sweet son, for there be many who deem him not,
Or will not deem him, wholly proven King—
Albeit in mine own heart I knew him King,
When I was frequent with him in my youth,
And heard him Kingly speak, and doubted him
No more than he, himself; but felt him mine,
Of closest kin to me: yet—wilt thou leave
Thine easeful biding here, and risk thine all,
Life, limbs, for one that is not proven King?
Stay, till the cloud that settles round his birth
Hath lifted but a little. Stay, sweet son.’

And Gareth answered quickly, ‘Not an hour,
So that ye yield me—I will walk through fire,
Mother, to gain it—your full leave to go.
Not proven, who swept the dust of ruined Rome
From off the threshold of the realm, and crushed
The Idolaters, and made the people free?
Who should be King save him who makes us free?’

So when the Queen, who long had sought in vain
To break him from the intent to which he grew,
Found her son's will unwaveringly one,
She answered craftily, ‘Will ye walk through fire?
Who walks through fire will hardly heed the smoke.
Ay, go then, an ye must: only one proof,
Before thou ask the King to make thee knight,
Of thine obedience and thy love to me,
Thy mother,—I demand.

And Gareth cried,
‘A hard one, or a hundred, so I go.
Nay—quick! the proof to prove me to the quick!’

But slowly spake the mother looking at him,
‘Prince, thou shalt go disguised to Arthur's hall,
And hire thyself to serve for meats and drinks
Among the scullions and the kitchen-knaves,
And those that hand the dish across the bar.
Nor shalt thou tell thy name to anyone.
And thou shalt serve a twelvemonth and a day.’

For so the Queen believed that when her son
Beheld his only way to glory lead
Low down through villain kitchen-vassalage,
Her own true Gareth was too princely-proud
To pass thereby; so should he rest with her,
Closed in her castle from the sound of arms.

Silent awhile was Gareth, then replied,
‘The thrall in person may be free in soul,

And I shall see the jousts. Thy son am I,
And since thou art my mother, must obey.
I therefore yield me freely to thy will;
For hence will I, disguised, and hire myself
To serve with scullions and with kitchen-knaves;
Nor tell my name to any—no, not the King.'

Gareth awhile lingered. The mother's eye
Full of the wistful fear that he would go,
And turning toward him wheresoe'er he turned,
Perplext his outward purpose, till an hour,
When wakened by the wind which with full voice
Swept bellowing through the darkness on to dawn,
He rose, and out of slumber calling two
That still had tended on him from his birth,
Before the wakeful mother heard him, went.

The three were clad like tillers of the soil.
Southward they set their faces. The birds made
Melody on branch, and melody in mid air.
The damp hill-slopes were quickened into green,
And the live green had kindled into flowers,
For it was past the time of Easterday.

So, when their feet were planted on the plain
That broadened toward the base of Camelot,
Far off they saw the silver-misty morn
Rolling her smoke about the Royal mount,
That rose between the forest and the field.
At times the summit of the high city flashed;
At times the spires and turrets half-way down
Pricked through the mist; at times the great gate shone
Only, that opened on the field below:
Anon, the whole fair city had disappeared.

Then those who went with Gareth were amazed,
One crying, 'Let us go no further, lord.
Here is a city of Enchanters, built
By fairy Kings.' The second echoed him,
'Lord, we have heard from our wise man at home
To Northward, that this King is not the King,
But only changeling out of Fairyland,
Who drave the heathen hence by sorcery
And Merlin's glamour.' Then the first again,
'Lord, there is no such city anywhere,
But all a vision.'

Gareth answered them
With laughter, swearing he had glamour enow
In his own blood, his pryncedom, youth and hopes,
To plunge old Merlin in the Arabian sea;
So pushed them all unwilling toward the gate.
And there was no gate like it under heaven.
For barefoot on the keystone, which was lined
And rippled like an ever-fleeting wave,
The Lady of the Lake stood: all her dress
Wept from her sides as water flowing away;
But like the cross her great and goodly arms
Stretched under the cornice and upheld:

And drops of water fell from either hand;
And down from one a sword was hung, from one
A censer, either worn with wind and storm;
And o'er her breast floated the sacred fish;
And in the space to left of her, and right,
Were Arthur's wars in weird devices done,
New things and old co-twisted, as if Time
Were nothing, so inveterately, that men
Were giddy gazing there; and over all
High on the top were those three Queens, the friends
Of Arthur, who should help him at his need.

Then those with Gareth for so long a space
Stared at the figures, that at last it seemed
The dragon-boughts and elvish emblemings
Began to move, seethe, twine and curl: they called
To Gareth, 'Lord, the gateway is alive.'

And Gareth likewise on them fixt his eyes
So long, that even to him they seemed to move.
Out of the city a blast of music pealed.
Back from the gate started the three, to whom
From out thereunder came an ancient man,
Long-bearded, saying, 'Who be ye, my sons?'

Then Gareth, 'We be tillers of the soil,
Who leaving share in furrow come to see
The glories of our King: but these, my men,
(Your city moved so weirdly in the mist)
Doubt if the King be King at all, or come
From Fairyland; and whether this be built
By magic, and by fairy Kings and Queens;
Or whether there be any city at all,
Or all a vision: and this music now
Hath scared them both, but tell thou these the truth.'

Then that old Seer made answer playing on him
And saying, 'Son, I have seen the good ship sail
Keel upward, and mast downward, in the heavens,
And solid turrets topsy-turvy in air:
And here is truth; but an it please thee not,
Take thou the truth as thou hast told it me.
For truly as thou sayest, a Fairy King
And Fairy Queens have built the city, son;
They came from out a sacred mountain-cleft
Toward the sunrise, each with harp in hand,
And built it to the music of their harps.
And, as thou sayest, it is enchanted, son,
For there is nothing in it as it seems
Saving the King; though some there be that hold
The King a shadow, and the city real:
Yet take thou heed of him, for, so thou pass
Beneath this archway, then wilt thou become
A thrall to his enchantments, for the King
Will bind thee by such vows, as is a shame
A man should not be bound by, yet the which
No man can keep; but, so thou dread to swear,
Pass not beneath this gateway, but abide

Without, among the cattle of the field.
For an ye heard a music, like enow
They are building still, seeing the city is built
To music, therefore never built at all,
And therefore built for ever.'

Gareth spake
Angered, 'Old master, reverence thine own beard
That looks as white as utter truth, and seems
Wellnigh as long as thou art statures tall!
Why mockest thou the stranger that hath been
To thee fair-spoken?'

But the Seer replied,
'Know ye not then the Riddling of the Bards?
"Confusion, and illusion, and relation,
Elusion, and occasion, and evasion"?'
I mock thee not but as thou mockest me,
And all that see thee, for thou art not who
Thou seemest, but I know thee who thou art.
And now thou goest up to mock the King,
Who cannot brook the shadow of any lie.'

Unmockingly the mocker ending here
Turned to the right, and past along the plain;
Whom Gareth looking after said, 'My men,
Our one white lie sits like a little ghost
Here on the threshold of our enterprise.
Let love be blamed for it, not she, nor I:
Well, we will make amends.'

With all good cheer
He spake and laughed, then entered with his twain
Camelot, a city of shadowy palaces
And stately, rich in emblem and the work
Of ancient kings who did their days in stone;
Which Merlin's hand, the Mage at Arthur's court,
Knowing all arts, had touched, and everywhere
At Arthur's ordinance, tipt with lessening peak
And pinnacle, and had made it spire to heaven.
And ever and anon a knight would pass
Outward, or inward to the hall: his arms
Clashed; and the sound was good to Gareth's ear.
And out of bower and casement shyly glanced
Eyes of pure women, wholesome stars of love;
And all about a healthful people stept
As in the presence of a gracious king.

Then into hall Gareth ascending heard
A voice, the voice of Arthur, and beheld
Far over heads in that long-vaulted hall
The splendour of the presence of the King
Throned, and delivering doom—and looked no more—
But felt his young heart hammering in his ears,
And thought, 'For this half-shadow of a lie
The truthful King will doom me when I speak.'
Yet pressing on, though all in fear to find
Sir Gawain or Sir Modred, saw nor one
Nor other, but in all the listening eyes

Of those tall knights, that ranged about the throne,
Clear honour shining like the dewy star
Of dawn, and faith in their great King, with pure
Affection, and the light of victory,
And glory gained, and evermore to gain.
Then came a widow crying to the King,
'A boon, Sir King! Thy father, Uther, reft
From my dead lord a field with violence:
For howsoe'er at first he proffered gold,
Yet, for the field was pleasant in our eyes,
We yielded not; and then he reft us of it
Perforce, and left us neither gold nor field.'

Said Arthur, 'Whether would ye? gold or field?'
To whom the woman weeping, 'Nay, my lord,
The field was pleasant in my husband's eye.'

And Arthur, 'Have thy pleasant field again,
And thrice the gold for Uther's use thereof,
According to the years. No boon is here,
But justice, so thy say be proven true.
Accursed, who from the wrongs his father did
Would shape himself a right!'

And while she past,
Came yet another widow crying to him,
'A boon, Sir King! Thine enemy, King, am I.
With thine own hand thou slewest my dear lord,
A knight of Uther in the Barons' war,
When Lot and many another rose and fought
Against thee, saying thou wert basely born.
I held with these, and loathe to ask thee aught.
Yet lo! my husband's brother had my son
Thralled in his castle, and hath starved him dead;
And standeth seized of that inheritance
Which thou that slewest the sire hast left the son.
So though I scarce can ask it thee for hate,
Grant me some knight to do the battle for me,
Kill the foul thief, and wreak me for my son.'

Then strode a good knight forward, crying to him,
'A boon, Sir King! I am her kinsman, I.
Give me to right her wrong, and slay the man.'

Then came Sir Kay, the seneschal, and cried,
'A boon, Sir King! even that thou grant her none,
This railer, that hath mocked thee in full hall—
None; or the wholesome boon of gyve and gag.'

But Arthur, 'We sit King, to help the wronged
Through all our realm. The woman loves her lord.
Peace to thee, woman, with thy loves and hates!
The kings of old had doomed thee to the flames,
Aurelius Emrys would have scourged thee dead,
And Uther slit thy tongue: but get thee hence—
Lest that rough humour of the kings of old
Return upon me! Thou that art her kin,
Go likewise; lay him low and slay him not,
But bring him here, that I may judge the right,

According to the justice of the King:
Then, be he guilty, by that deathless King
Who lived and died for men, the man shall die.'

Then came in hall the messenger of Mark,
A name of evil savour in the land,
The Cornish king. In either hand he bore
What dazzled all, and shone far-off as shines
A field of charlock in the sudden sun
Between two showers, a cloth of palest gold,
Which down he laid before the throne, and knelt,
Delivering, that his lord, the vassal king,
Was even upon his way to Camelot;
For having heard that Arthur of his grace
Had made his goodly cousin, Tristram, knight,
And, for himself was of the greater state,
Being a king, he trusted his liege-lord
Would yield him this large honour all the more;
So prayed him well to accept this cloth of gold,
In token of true heart and fealty.

Then Arthur cried to rend the cloth, to rend
In pieces, and so cast it on the hearth.
An oak-tree smouldered there. 'The goodly knight!
What! shall the shield of Mark stand among these?'
For, midway down the side of that long hall
A stately pile,—whereof along the front,
Some blazoned, some but carven, and some blank,
There ran a treble range of stony shields,—
Rose, and high-arching overbrowed the hearth.
And under every shield a knight was named:
For this was Arthur's custom in his hall;
When some good knight had done one noble deed,
His arms were carven only; but if twain
His arms were blazoned also; but if none,
The shield was blank and bare without a sign
Saving the name beneath; and Gareth saw
The shield of Gawain blazoned rich and bright,
And Modred's blank as death; and Arthur cried
To rend the cloth and cast it on the hearth.

'More like are we to reave him of his crown
Than make him knight because men call him king.
The kings we found, ye know we stayed their hands
From war among themselves, but left them kings;
Of whom were any bounteous, merciful,
Truth-speaking, brave, good livers, them we enrolled
Among us, and they sit within our hall.
But as Mark hath tarnished the great name of king,
As Mark would sully the low state of churl:
And, seeing he hath sent us cloth of gold,
Return, and meet, and hold him from our eyes,
Lest we should lap him up in cloth of lead,
Silenced for ever—craven—a man of plots,
Craft, poisonous counsels, wayside ambushings—
No fault of thine: let Kay the seneschal
Look to thy wants, and send thee satisfied—

Accursed, who strikes nor lets the hand be seen!’

And many another suppliant crying came
With noise of ravage wrought by beast and man,
And evermore a knight would ride away.

Last, Gareth leaning both hands heavily
Down on the shoulders of the twain, his men,
Approached between them toward the King, and asked,
‘A boon, Sir King (his voice was all ashamed),
For see ye not how weak and hungerworn
I seem—leaning on these? grant me to serve
For meat and drink among thy kitchen-knives
A twelvemonth and a day, nor seek my name.
Hereafter I will fight.’

To him the King,
‘A goodly youth and worth a goodlier boon!
But so thou wilt no goodlier, then must Kay,
The master of the meats and drinks, be thine.’

He rose and past; then Kay, a man of mien
Wan-sallow as the plant that feels itself
Root-bitten by white lichen,

‘Lo ye now!

This fellow hath broken from some Abbey, where,
God wot, he had not beef and brewis enow,
However that might chance! but an he work,
Like any pigeon will I cram his crop,
And sleeker shall he shine than any hog.’

Then Lancelot standing near, ‘Sir Seneschal,
Sleuth-hound thou knowest, and gray, and all the hounds;
A horse thou knowest, a man thou dost not know:
Broad brows and fair, a fluent hair and fine,
High nose, a nostril large and fine, and hands
Large, fair and fine!—Some young lad’s mystery—
But, or from sheepcot or king’s hall, the boy
Is noble-natured. Treat him with all grace,
Lest he should come to shame thy judging of him.’

Then Kay, ‘What murmurest thou of mystery?
Think ye this fellow will poison the King’s dish?
Nay, for he spake too fool-like: mystery!
Tut, an the lad were noble, he had asked
For horse and armour: fair and fine, forsooth!
Sir Fine-face, Sir Fair-hands? but see thou to it
That thine own fineness, Lancelot, some fine day
Undo thee not—and leave my man to me.’

So Gareth all for glory underwent
The sooty yoke of kitchen-vassalage;
Ate with young lads his portion by the door,
And couched at night with grimy kitchen-knives.
And Lancelot ever spake him pleasantly,
But Kay the seneschal, who loved him not,
Would hustle and harry him, and labour him
Beyond his comrade of the hearth, and set
To turn the broach, draw water, or hew wood,
Or grosser tasks; and Gareth bowed himself

With all obedience to the King, and wrought
All kind of service with a noble ease
That graced the lowliest act in doing it.
And when the thralls had talk among themselves,
And one would praise the love that linkt the King
And Lancelot—how the King had saved his life
In battle twice, and Lancelot once the King's—
For Lancelot was the first in Tournament,
But Arthur mightiest on the battle-field—
Gareth was glad. Or if some other told,
How once the wandering forester at dawn,
Far over the blue tarns and hazy seas,
On Caer-Eryri's highest found the King,
A naked babe, of whom the Prophet spake,
'He passes to the Isle Avilion,
He passes and is healed and cannot die'—
Gareth was glad. But if their talk were foul,
Then would he whistle rapid as any lark,
Or carol some old roundelay, and so loud
That first they mocked, but, after, revered him.
Or Gareth telling some prodigious tale
Of knights, who sliced a red life-bubbling way
Through twenty folds of twisted dragon, held
All in a gap-mouthed circle his good mates
Lying or sitting round him, idle hands,
Charmed; till Sir Kay, the seneschal, would come
Blustering upon them, like a sudden wind
Among dead leaves, and drive them all apart.
Or when the thralls had sport among themselves,
So there were any trial of mastery,
He, by two yards in casting bar or stone
Was counted best; and if there chanced a joust,
So that Sir Kay nodded him leave to go,
Would hurry thither, and when he saw the knights
Clash like the coming and retiring wave,
And the spear spring, and good horse reel, the boy
Was half beyond himself for ecstasy.

So for a month he wrought among the thralls;
But in the weeks that followed, the good Queen,
Repentant of the word she made him swear,
And saddening in her childless castle, sent,
Between the in-crescent and de-crescent moon,
Arms for her son, and loosed him from his vow.

This, Gareth hearing from a squire of Lot
With whom he used to play at tourney once,
When both were children, and in lonely haunts
Would scratch a ragged oval on the sand,
And each at either dash from either end—
Shame never made girl redder than Gareth joy.
He laughed; he sprang. 'Out of the smoke, at once
I leap from Satan's foot to Peter's knee—
These news be mine, none other's—nay, the King's—
Descend into the city:' whereon he sought
The King alone, and found, and told him all.

'I have staggered thy strong Gawain in a tilt
For pastime; yea, he said it: joust can I.
Make me thy knight—in secret! let my name
Be hidden, and give me the first quest, I spring
Like flame from ashes.'

Here the King's calm eye
Fell on, and checked, and made him flush, and bow
Lowly, to kiss his hand, who answered him,
'Son, the good mother let me know thee here,
And sent her wish that I would yield thee thine.
Make thee my knight? my knights are sworn to vows
Of utter hardihood, utter gentleness,
And, loving, utter faithfulness in love,
And uttermost obedience to the King.'

Then Gareth, lightly springing from his knees,
'My King, for hardihood I can promise thee.
For uttermost obedience make demand
Of whom ye gave me to, the Seneschal,
No mellow master of the meats and drinks!
And as for love, God wot, I love not yet,
But love I shall, God willing.'

And the King
'Make thee my knight in secret? yea, but he,
Our noblest brother, and our truest man,
And one with me in all, he needs must know.'
'Let Lancelot know, my King, let Lancelot know,
Thy noblest and thy truest!'

And the King—
'But wherefore would ye men should wonder at you?
Nay, rather for the sake of me, their King,
And the deed's sake my knighthood do the deed,
Than to be noised of.'

Merrily Gareth asked,
'Have I not earned my cake in baking of it?
Let be my name until I make my name!
My deeds will speak: it is but for a day.'
So with a kindly hand on Gareth's arm
Smiled the great King, and half-unwillingly
Loving his lusty youthhood yielded to him.
Then, after summoning Lancelot privily,
'I have given him the first quest: he is not proven.
Look therefore when he calls for this in hall,
Thou get to horse and follow him far away.
Cover the lions on thy shield, and see
Far as thou mayest, he be nor ta'en nor slain.'

Then that same day there past into the hall
A damsel of high lineage, and a brow
May-blossom, and a cheek of apple-blossom,
Hawk-eyes; and lightly was her slender nose
Tip-tilted like the petal of a flower;
She into hall past with her page and cried,
'O King, for thou hast driven the foe without,
See to the foe within! bridge, ford, beset

By bandits, everyone that owns a tower
The Lord for half a league. Why sit ye there?
Rest would I not, Sir King, an I were king,
Till even the lonest hold were all as free
From cursed bloodshed, as thine altar-cloth
From that best blood it is a sin to spill.’
‘Comfort thyself,’ said Arthur. ‘I nor mine
Rest: so my knighthood keep the vows they swore,
The wastest moorland of our realm shall be
Safe, damsel, as the centre of this hall.
What is thy name? thy need?’
‘My name?’ she said—
‘Lynette my name; noble; my need, a knight
To combat for my sister, Lyonors,
A lady of high lineage, of great lands,
And comely, yea, and comelier than myself.
She lives in Castle Perilous: a river
Runs in three loops about her living-place;
And o’er it are three passings, and three knights
Defend the passings, brethren, and a fourth
And of that four the mightiest, holds her stayed
In her own castle, and so besieges her
To break her will, and make her wed with him:
And but delays his purport till thou send
To do the battle with him, thy chief man
Sir Lancelot whom he trusts to overthrow,
Then wed, with glory: but she will not wed
Save whom she loveth, or a holy life.
Now therefore have I come for Lancelot.’
Then Arthur mindful of Sir Gareth asked,
‘Damsel, ye know this Order lives to crush
All wrongers of the Realm. But say, these four,
Who be they? What the fashion of the men?’
‘They be of foolish fashion, O Sir King,
The fashion of that old knight-errantry
Who ride abroad, and do but what they will;
Courteous or bestial from the moment, such
As have nor law nor king; and three of these
Proud in their fantasy call themselves the Day,
Morning-Star, and Noon-Sun, and Evening-Star,
Being strong fools; and never a whit more wise
The fourth, who alway rideth armed in black,
A huge man-beast of boundless savagery.
He names himself the Night and oftener Death,
And wears a helmet mounted with a skull,
And bears a skeleton figured on his arms,
To show that who may slay or scape the three,
Slain by himself, shall enter endless night.
And all these four be fools, but mighty men,
And therefore am I come for Lancelot.’
Hereat Sir Gareth called from where he rose,
A head with kindling eyes above the throng,
‘A boon, Sir King—this quest!’ then—for he marked
Kay near him groaning like a wounded bull—

'Yea, King, thou knowest thy kitchen-knave am I,
And mighty through thy meats and drinks am I,
And I can topple over a hundred such.
Thy promise, King,' and Arthur glancing at him,
Brought down a momentary brow. 'Rough, sudden,
And pardonable, worthy to be knight—
Go therefore,' and all hearers were amazed.

But on the damsel's forehead shame, pride, wrath
Slew the May-white: she lifted either arm,
'Fie on thee, King! I asked for thy chief knight,
And thou hast given me but a kitchen-knave.'
Then ere a man in hall could stay her, turned,
Fled down the lane of access to the King,
Took horse, descended the slope street, and past
The weird white gate, and paused without, beside
The field of tourney, murmuring 'kitchen-knave.'

Now two great entries opened from the hall,
At one end one, that gave upon a range
Of level pavement where the King would pace
At sunrise, gazing over plain and wood;
And down from this a lordly stairway sloped
Till lost in blowing trees and tops of towers;
And out by this main doorway past the King.
But one was counter to the hearth, and rose
High that the highest-crested helm could ride
Therethrough nor graze: and by this entry fled
The damsel in her wrath, and on to this
Sir Gareth strode, and saw without the door
King Arthur's gift, the worth of half a town,
A warhorse of the best, and near it stood
The two that out of north had followed him:
This bare a maiden shield, a casque; that held
The horse, the spear; whereat Sir Gareth loosed
A cloak that dropt from collar-bone to heel,
A cloth of roughest web, and cast it down,
And from it like a fuel-smothered fire,
That lookt half-dead, brake bright, and flashed as those
Dull-coated things, that making slide apart
Their dusk wing-cases, all beneath there burns
A jewelled harness, ere they pass and fly.
So Gareth ere he parted flashed in arms.
Then as he donned the helm, and took the shield
And mounted horse and graspt a spear, of grain
Storm-strengthened on a windy site, and tipt
With trenchant steel, around him slowly prest
The people, while from out of kitchen came
The thralls in throng, and seeing who had worked
Lustier than any, and whom they could but love,
Mounted in arms, threw up their caps and cried,
'God bless the King, and all his fellowship!'
And on through lanes of shouting Gareth rode
Down the slope street, and past without the gate.
So Gareth past with joy; but as the cur
Pluckt from the cur he fights with, ere his cause

Be cooled by fighting, follows, being named,
His owner, but remembers all, and growls
Remembering, so Sir Kay beside the door
Muttered in scorn of Gareth whom he used
To harry and hustle.

'Bound upon a quest
With horse and arms—the King hath past his time—
My scullion knave! Thralls to your work again,
For an your fire be low ye kindle mine!
Will there be dawn in West and eve in East?
Begone!—my knave!—belike and like enow
Some old head-blow not heeded in his youth
So shook his wits they wander in his prime—
Crazed! How the villain lifted up his voice,
Nor shamed to bawl himself a kitchen-knave.
Tut: he was tame and meek enow with me,
Till peacocked up with Lancelot's noticing.
Well—I will after my loud knave, and learn
Whether he know me for his master yet.
Out of the smoke he came, and so my lance
Hold, by God's grace, he shall into the mire—
Thence, if the King awaken from his craze,
Into the smoke again.'

But Lancelot said,
'Kay, wherefore wilt thou go against the King,
For that did never he whereon ye rail,
But ever meekly served the King in thee?
Abide: take counsel; for this lad is great
And lusty, and knowing both of lance and sword.'
'Tut, tell not me,' said Kay, 'ye are overfine
To mar stout knaves with foolish courtesies.'
Then mounted, on through silent faces rode
Down the slope city, and out beyond the gate.
But by the field of tourney lingering yet
Muttered the damsel, 'Wherefore did the King
Scorn me? for, were Sir Lancelot lackt, at least
He might have yielded to me one of those
Who tilt for lady's love and glory here,
Rather than—O sweet heaven! O fie upon him—
His kitchen-knave.'

To whom Sir Gareth drew
(And there were none but few goodlier than he)
Shining in arms, 'Damsel, the quest is mine.
Lead, and I follow.' She thereat, as one
That smells a foul-fleshed agaric in the holt,
And deems it carrion of some woodland thing,
Or shrew, or weasel, nipt her slender nose
With petulant thumb and finger, shrilling, 'Hence!
Avoid, thou smellest all of kitchen-grease.
And look who comes behind,' for there was Kay.
'Knowest thou not me? thy master? I am Kay.
We lack thee by the hearth.'

And Gareth to him,
'Master no more! too well I know thee, ay—

The most ungentle knight in Arthur's hall.
'Have at thee then,' said Kay: they shocked, and Kay
Fell shoulder-slipt, and Gareth cried again,
'Lead, and I follow,' and fast away she fled.

But after sod and shingle ceased to fly
Behind her, and the heart of her good horse
Was nigh to burst with violence of the beat,
Perforce she stayed, and overtaken spoke.

'What doest thou, scullion, in my fellowship?
Deem'st thou that I accept thee aught the more
Or love thee better, that by some device
Full cowardly, or by mere unhappiness,
Thou hast overthrown and slain thy master—thou!—
Dish-washer and broach-turner, loon!—to me
Thou smellest all of kitchen as before.'

'Damsel,' Sir Gareth answered gently, 'say
Whate'er ye will, but whatsoe'er ye say,
I leave not till I finish this fair quest,
Or die therefore.'

'Ay, wilt thou finish it?
Sweet lord, how like a noble knight he talks!
The listening rogue hath caught the manner of it.
But, knave, anon thou shalt be met with, knave,
And then by such a one that thou for all
The kitchen brewis that was ever supt
Shalt not once dare to look him in the face.'

'I shall assay,' said Gareth with a smile
That maddened her, and away she flashed again
Down the long avenues of a boundless wood,
And Gareth following was again beknaved.

'Sir Kitchen-knave, I have missed the only way
Where Arthur's men are set along the wood;
The wood is nigh as full of thieves as leaves:
If both be slain, I am rid of thee; but yet,
Sir Scullion, canst thou use that spit of thine?
Fight, an thou canst: I have missed the only way.'

So till the dusk that followed evensong
Rode on the two, reviler and reviled;
Then after one long slope was mounted, saw,
Bowl-shaped, through tops of many thousand pines
A gloomy-gladed hollow slowly sink
To westward—in the deeps whereof a mere,
Round as the red eye of an Eagle-owl,
Under the half-dead sunset glared; and shouts
Ascended, and there brake a servingman
Flying from out of the black wood, and crying,
'They have bound my lord to cast him in the mere.'
Then Gareth, 'Bound am I to right the wronged,
But straitlier bound am I to bide with thee.'
And when the damsel spake contemptuously,
'Lead, and I follow,' Gareth cried again,
'Follow, I lead!' so down among the pines
He plunged; and there, blackshadowed nigh the mere,

And mid-thigh-deep in bulrushes and reed,
 Saw six tall men haling a seventh along,
 A stone about his neck to drown him in it.
 Three with good blows he quieted, but three
 Fled through the pines; and Gareth loosed the stone
 From off his neck, then in the mere beside
 Tumbled it; oilily bubbled up the mere.
 Last, Gareth loosed his bonds and on free feet
 Set him, a stalwart Baron, Arthur's friend.

'Well that ye came, or else these caitiff rogues
 Had wreaked themselves on me; good cause is theirs
 To hate me, for my wont hath ever been
 To catch my thief, and then like vermin here
 Drown him, and with a stone about his neck;
 And under this wan water many of them
 Lie rotting, but at night let go the stone,
 And rise, and flickering in a grimly light
 Dance on the mere. Good now, ye have saved a life
 Worth somewhat as the cleanser of this wood.
 And fain would I reward thee worshipfully.
 What guerdon will ye?'

Gareth sharply spake,
 'None! for the deed's sake have I done the deed,
 In uttermost obedience to the King.
 But wilt thou yield this damsel harbourage?'

Whereat the Baron saying, 'I well believe
 You be of Arthur's Table,' a light laugh
 Broke from Lynette, 'Ay, truly of a truth,
 And in a sort, being Arthur's kitchen-knave!—
 But deem not I accept thee aught the more,
 Scullion, for running sharply with thy spit
 Down on a rout of craven foresters.
 A thresher with his flail had scattered them.
 Nay—for thou smellest of the kitchen still.
 But an this lord will yield us harbourage,
 Well.'

So she spake. A league beyond the wood,
 All in a full-fair manor and a rich,
 His towers where that day a feast had been
 Held in high hall, and many a viand left,
 And many a costly cate, received the three.
 And there they placed a peacock in his pride
 Before the damsel, and the Baron set
 Gareth beside her, but at once she rose.

'Meseems, that here is much discourtesy,
 Setting this knave, Lord Baron, at my side.
 Hear me—this morn I stood in Arthur's hall,
 And prayed the King would grant me Lancelot
 To fight the brotherhood of Day and Night—
 The last a monster unsubduable
 Of any save of him for whom I called—
 Suddenly bawls this frontless kitchen-knave,
 "The quest is mine; thy kitchen-knave am I,
 And mighty through thy meats and drinks am I."

Then Arthur all at once gone mad replies,
"Go therefore," and so gives the quest to him—
Him—here—a villain fitter to stick swine
Than ride abroad redressing women's wrong,
Or sit beside a noble gentlewoman.'

Then half-ashamed and part-amazed, the lord
Now looked at one and now at other, left
The damsel by the peacock in his pride,
And, seating Gareth at another board,
Sat down beside him, ate and then began.

'Friend, whether thou be kitchen-knave, or not,
Or whether it be the maiden's fantasy,
And whether she be mad, or else the King,
Or both or neither, or thyself be mad,
I ask not: but thou strikest a strong stroke,
For strong thou art and goodly therewithal,
And savor of my life; and therefore now,
For here be mighty men to joust with, weigh
Whether thou wilt not with thy damsel back
To crave again Sir Lancelot of the King.
Thy pardon; I but speak for thine avail,
The savor of my life.'

And Gareth said,
'Full pardon, but I follow up the quest,
Despite of Day and Night and Death and Hell.'

So when, next morn, the lord whose life he saved
Had, some brief space, conveyed them on their way
And left them with God-speed, Sir Gareth spake,
'Lead, and I follow.' Haughtily she replied.

'I fly no more: I allow thee for an hour.
Lion and stout have isled together, knave,
In time of flood. Nay, furthermore, methinks
Some ruth is mine for thee. Back wilt thou, fool?
For hard by here is one will overthrow
And slay thee: then will I to court again,
And shame the King for only yielding me
My champion from the ashes of his hearth.'

To whom Sir Gareth answered courteously,
'Say thou thy say, and I will do my deed.
Allow me for mine hour, and thou wilt find
My fortunes all as fair as hers who lay
Among the ashes and wedded the King's son.'

Then to the shore of one of those long loops
Wherethrough the serpent river coiled, they came.
Rough-thicketed were the banks and steep; the stream
Full, narrow; this a bridge of single arc
Took at a leap; and on the further side
Arose a silk pavilion, gay with gold
In streaks and rays, and all Lent-lily in hue,
Save that the dome was purple, and above,
Crimson, a slender banneret fluttering.
And therefore the lawless warrior paced
Unarmed, and calling, 'Damsel, is this he,

The champion thou hast brought from Arthur's hall?
For whom we let thee pass.' 'Nay, nay,' she said,
'Sir Morning-Star. The King in utter scorn
Of thee and thy much folly hath sent thee here
His kitchen-knave: and look thou to thyself:
See that he fall not on thee suddenly,
And slay thee unarmed: he is not knight but knave.'

Then at his call, 'O daughters of the Dawn,
And servants of the Morning-Star, approach,
Arm me,' from out the silken curtain-folds
Bare-footed and bare-headed three fair girls
In gilt and rosy raiment came: their feet
In dewy grasses glistened; and the hair
All over glanced with dewdrop or with gem
Like sparkles in the stone Avanturine.
These armed him in blue arms, and gave a shield
Blue also, and thereon the morning star.
And Gareth silent gazed upon the knight,
Who stood a moment, ere his horse was brought,
Glorying; and in the stream beneath him, shone
Immingled with Heaven's azure waveringly,
The gay pavilion and the naked feet,
His arms, the rosy raiment, and the star.

Then she that watched him, 'Wherefore stare ye so?
Thou shakest in thy fear: there yet is time:
Flee down the valley before he get to horse.
Who will cry shame? Thou art not knight but knave.'
Said Gareth, 'Damsel, whether knave or knight,
Far liefer had I fight a score of times
Than hear thee so missay me and revile.
Fair words were best for him who fights for thee;
But truly foul are better, for they send
That strength of anger through mine arms, I know
That I shall overthrow him.'

And he that bore
The star, when mounted, cried from o'er the bridge,
'A kitchen-knave, and sent in scorn of me!
Such fight not I, but answer scorn with scorn.
For this were shame to do him further wrong
Than set him on his feet, and take his horse
And arms, and so return him to the King.
Come, therefore, leave thy lady lightly, knave.
Avoid: for it beseemeth not a knave
To ride with such a lady.'

'Dog, thou liest.
I spring from loftier lineage than thine own.'
He spake; and all at fiery speed the two
Shocked on the central bridge, and either spear
Bent but not brake, and either knight at once,
Hurled as a stone from out of a catapult
Beyond his horse's crupper and the bridge,
Fell, as if dead; but quickly rose and drew,
And Gareth lashed so fiercely with his brand
He drave his enemy backward down the bridge,

The damsel crying, 'Well-stricken, kitchen-knave!'
Till Gareth's shield was cloven; but one stroke
Laid him that clove it grovelling on the ground.
Then cried the fallen, 'Take not my life: I yield.'
And Gareth, 'So this damsel ask it of me
Good—I accord it easily as a grace.'
She reddening, 'Insolent scullion: I of thee?
I bound to thee for any favour asked!'
'Then he shall die.' And Gareth there unlaced
His helmet as to slay him, but she shrieked,
'Be not so hardy, scullion, as to slay
One nobler than thyself.' 'Damsel, thy charge
Is an abounding pleasure to me. Knight,
Thy life is thine at her command. Arise
And quickly pass to Arthur's hall, and say
His kitchen-knave hath sent thee. See thou crave
His pardon for thy breaking of his laws.
Myself, when I return, will plead for thee.
Thy shield is mine—farewell; and, damsel, thou,
Lead, and I follow.'
And fast away she fled.
Then when he came upon her, spake, 'Methought,
Knave, when I watched thee striking on the bridge
The savour of thy kitchen came upon me
A little faintlier: but the wind hath changed:
I scent it twenty-fold.' And then she sang,
"O morning star" (not that tall felon there
Whom thou by sorcery or unhappiness
Or some device, hast foully overthrown),
"O morning star that smilest in the blue,
O star, my morning dream hath proven true,
Smile sweetly, thou! my love hath smiled on me."
'But thou begone, take counsel, and away,
For hard by here is one that guards a ford—
The second brother in their fool's parable—
Will pay thee all thy wages, and to boot.
Care not for shame: thou art not knight but knave.'
To whom Sir Gareth answered, laughingly,
'Parables? Hear a parable of the knave.
When I was kitchen-knave among the rest
Fierce was the hearth, and one of my co-mates
Owned a rough dog, to whom he cast his coat,
"Guard it," and there was none to meddle with it.
And such a coat art thou, and thee the King
Gave me to guard, and such a dog am I,
To worry, and not to flee—and—knight or knave—
The knave that doth thee service as full knight
Is all as good, meseems, as any knight
Toward thy sister's freeing.'
'Ay, Sir Knave!
Ay, knave, because thou strikest as a knight,
Being but knave, I hate thee all the more.'
'Fair damsel, you should worship me the more,
That, being but knave, I throw thine enemies.'

'Ay, ay,' she said, 'but thou shalt meet thy match.'
 So when they touched the second river-loop,
 Huge on a huge red horse, and all in mail
 Burnished to blinding, shone the Noonday Sun
 Beyond a raging shallow. As if the flower,
 That blows a globe of after arrowlets,
 Ten thousand-fold had grown, flashed the fierce shield,
 All sun; and Gareth's eyes had flying blots
 Before them when he turned from watching him.
 He from beyond the roaring shallow roared,
 'What doest thou, brother, in my marches here?'
 And she athwart the shallow shrilled again,
 'Here is a kitchen-knave from Arthur's hall
 Hath overthrown thy brother, and hath his arms.'
 'Ugh!' cried the Sun, and vizoring up a red
 And cipher face of rounded foolishness,
 Pushed horse across the foamings of the ford,
 Whom Gareth met midstream: no room was there
 For lance or tourney-skill: four strokes they struck
 With sword, and these were mighty; the new knight
 Had fear he might be shamed; but as the Sun
 Heaved up a ponderous arm to strike the fifth,
 The hoof of his horse slipt in the stream, the stream
 Descended, and the Sun was washed away.
 Then Gareth laid his lance athwart the ford;
 So drew him home; but he that fought no more,
 As being all bone-battered on the rock,
 Yielded; and Gareth sent him to the King,
 'Myself when I return will plead for thee.'
 'Lead, and I follow.' Quietly she led.
 'Hath not the good wind, damsel, changed again?'
 'Nay, not a point: nor art thou victor here.
 There lies a ridge of slate across the ford;
 His horse thereon stumbled—ay, for I saw it.
 "O Sun" (not this strong fool whom thou, Sir Knave,
 Hast overthrown through mere unhappiness),
 "O Sun, that wakenest all to bliss or pain,
 O moon, that layest all to sleep again,
 Shine sweetly: twice my love hath smiled on me."
 What knowest thou of lovesong or of love?
 Nay, nay, God wot, so thou wert nobly born,
 Thou hast a pleasant presence. Yea, perchance,—
 "O dewy flowers that open to the sun,
 O dewy flowers that close when day is done,
 Blow sweetly: twice my love hath smiled on me."
 'What knowest thou of flowers, except, belike,
 To garnish meats with? hath not our good King
 Who lent me thee, the flower of kitchendom,
 A foolish love for flowers? what stick ye round
 The pasty? wherewithal deck the boar's head?
 Flowers? nay, the boar hath rosemaries and bay.
 "O birds, that warble to the morning sky,
 O birds that warble as the day goes by,
 Sing sweetly: twice my love hath smiled on me."

'What knowest thou of birds, lark, mavis, merle,
Linnet? what dream ye when they utter forth
May-music growing with the growing light,
Their sweet sun-worship? these be for the snare
(So runs thy fancy) these be for the spit,
Larding and basting. See thou have not now
Larded thy last, except thou turn and fly.
There stands the third fool of their allegory.'

For there beyond a bridge of treble bow,
All in a rose-red from the west, and all
Naked it seemed, and glowing in the broad
Deep-dimpled current underneath, the knight,
That named himself the Star of Evening, stood.

And Gareth, 'Wherefore waits the madman there
Naked in open dayshine?' 'Nay,' she cried,
'Not naked, only wrapt in hardened skins
That fit him like his own; and so ye cleave
His armour off him, these will turn the blade.'

Then the third brother shouted o'er the bridge,
'O brother-star, why shine ye here so low?
Thy ward is higher up: but have ye slain
The damsel's champion?' and the damsel cried,
'No star of thine, but shot from Arthur's heaven
With all disaster unto thine and thee!
For both thy younger brethren have gone down
Before this youth; and so wilt thou, Sir Star;
Art thou not old?'

'Old, damsel, old and hard,
Old, with the might and breath of twenty boys.'
Said Gareth, 'Old, and over-bold in brag!
But that same strength which threw the Morning Star
Can throw the Evening.'

Then that other blew
A hard and deadly note upon the horn.
'Approach and arm me!' With slow steps from out
An old storm-beaten, russet, many-stained
Pavilion, forth a grizzled damsel came,
And armed him in old arms, and brought a helm
With but a drying evergreen for crest,
And gave a shield whereon the Star of Even
Half-tarnished and half-bright, his emblem, shone.
But when it glittered o'er the saddle-bow,
They madly hurled together on the bridge;
And Gareth overthrew him, lighted, drew,
There met him drawn, and overthrew him again,
But up like fire he started: and as oft
As Gareth brought him grovelling on his knees,
So many a time he vaulted up again;
Till Gareth panted hard, and his great heart,
Foredooming all his trouble was in vain,
Laboured within him, for he seemed as one
That all in later, sadder age begins
To war against ill uses of a life,
But these from all his life arise, and cry,

'Thou hast made us lords, and canst not put us down!'
 He half despairs; so Gareth seemed to strike
 Vainly, the damsel clamouring all the while,
 'Well done, knave-knight, well-stricken, O good knight-knave—
 O knave, as noble as any of all the knights—
 Shame me not, shame me not. I have prophesied—
 Strike, thou art worthy of the Table Round—
 His arms are old, he trusts the hardened skin—
 Strike—strike—the wind will never change again.'
 And Gareth hearing ever stronglier smote,
 And hewed great pieces of his armour off him,
 But lashed in vain against the hardened skin,
 And could not wholly bring him under, more
 Than loud Southwesterns, rolling ridge on ridge,
 The buoy that rides at sea, and dips and springs
 For ever; till at length Sir Gareth's brand
 Clashed his, and brake it utterly to the hilt.
 'I have thee now;' but forth that other sprang,
 And, all unknightlike, writhed his wiry arms
 Around him, till he felt, despite his mail,
 Strangled, but straining even his uttermost
 Cast, and so hurled him headlong o'er the bridge
 Down to the river, sink or swim, and cried,
 'Lead, and I follow.'
 But the damsel said,
 'I lead no longer; ride thou at my side;
 Thou art the kingliest of all kitchen-knaves.
 "O trefoil, sparkling on the rainy plain,
 O rainbow with three colours after rain,
 Shine sweetly: thrice my love hath smiled on me."
 'Sir,—and, good faith, I fain had added—Knight,
 But that I heard thee call thyself a knave,—
 Shamed am I that I so rebuked, reviled,
 Missaid thee; noble I am; and thought the King
 Scorned me and mine; and now thy pardon, friend,
 For thou hast ever answered courteously,
 And wholly bold thou art, and meek withal
 As any of Arthur's best, but, being knave,
 Hast mazed my wit: I marvel what thou art.'
 'Damsel,' he said, 'you be not all to blame,
 Saving that you mistrusted our good King
 Would handle scorn, or yield you, asking, one
 Not fit to cope your quest. You said your say;
 Mine answer was my deed. Good sooth! I hold
 He scarce is knight, yea but half-man, nor meet
 To fight for gentle damsel, he, who lets
 His heart be stirred with any foolish heat
 At any gentle damsel's waywardness.
 Shamed? care not! thy foul sayings fought for me:
 And seeing now thy words are fair, methinks
 There rides no knight, not Lancelot, his great self,
 Hath force to quell me.'
 Nigh upon that hour
 When the lone hern forgets his melancholy,

Lets down his other leg, and stretching, dreams
Of goodly supper in the distant pool,
Then turned the noble damsel smiling at him,
And told him of a cavern hard at hand,
Where bread and baken meats and good red wine
Of Southland, which the Lady Lyonors
Had sent her coming champion, waited him.

Anon they past a narrow comb wherein
Where slabs of rock with figures, knights on horse
Sculptured, and deckt in slowly-waning hues.
'Sir Knave, my knight, a hermit once was here,
Whose holy hand hath fashioned on the rock
The war of Time against the soul of man.
And yon four fools have sucked their allegory
From these damp walls, and taken but the form.
Know ye not these?' and Gareth lookt and read—
In letters like to those the vexillary
Hath left crag-carven o'er the streaming Gelt—
'PHOSPHORUS,' then 'MERIDIES'—'HESPERUS'—
'NOX'—'MORS,' beneath five figures, armed men,
Slab after slab, their faces forward all,
And running down the Soul, a Shape that fled
With broken wings, torn raiment and loose hair,
For help and shelter to the hermit's cave.
'Follow the faces, and we find it. Look,
Who comes behind?'

For one—delayed at first
Through helping back the dislocated Kay
To Camelot, then by what thereafter chanced,
The damsel's headlong error through the wood—
Sir Lancelot, having swum the river-loops—
His blue shield-lions covered—softly drew
Behind the twain, and when he saw the star
Gleam, on Sir Gareth's turning to him, cried,
'Stay, felon knight, I avenge me for my friend.'
And Gareth crying pricked against the cry;
But when they closed—in a moment—at one touch
Of that skilled spear, the wonder of the world—
Went sliding down so easily, and fell,
That when he found the grass within his hands
He laughed; the laughter jarred upon Lynette:
Harshly she asked him, 'Shamed and overthrown,
And tumbled back into the kitchen-knave,
Why laugh ye? that ye blew your boast in vain?'
'Nay, noble damsel, but that I, the son
Of old King Lot and good Queen Bellicent,
And victor of the bridges and the ford,
And knight of Arthur, here lie thrown by whom
I know not, all through mere unhappiness—
Device and sorcery and unhappiness—
Out, sword; we are thrown!' And Lancelot answered, 'Prince,
O Gareth—through the mere unhappiness
Of one who came to help thee, not to harm,
Lancelot, and all as glad to find thee whole,

As on the day when Arthur knighted him.’
 Then Gareth, ’Thou—Lancelot!—thine the hand
 That threw me? An some chance to mar the boast
 Thy brethren of thee make—which could not chance—
 Had sent thee down before a lesser spear,
 Shamed had I been, and sad—O Lancelot—thou!’

Whereat the maiden, petulant, ’Lancelot,
 Why came ye not, when called? and wherefore now
 Come ye, not called? I gloried in my knave,
 Who being still rebuked, would answer still
 Courteous as any knight—but now, if knight,
 The marvel dies, and leaves me fooled and tricked,
 And only wondering wherefore played upon:
 And doubtful whether I and mine be scorned.
 Where should be truth if not in Arthur’s hall,
 In Arthur’s presence? Knight, knave, prince and fool,
 I hate thee and for ever.’

And Lancelot said,
 ’Blessed be thou, Sir Gareth! knight art thou
 To the King’s best wish. O damsel, be you wise
 To call him shamed, who is but overthrown?
 Thrown have I been, nor once, but many a time.
 Victor from vanquished issues at the last,
 And overthrower from being overthrown.
 With sword we have not striven; and thy good horse
 And thou are weary; yet not less I felt
 Thy manhood through that wearied lance of thine.
 Well hast thou done; for all the stream is freed,
 And thou hast wreaked his justice on his foes,
 And when reviled, hast answered graciously,
 And makest merry when overthrown. Prince, Knight
 Hail, Knight and Prince, and of our Table Round!’

And then when turning to Lynette he told
 The tale of Gareth, petulantly she said,
 ’Ay well—ay well—for worse than being fooled
 Of others, is to fool one’s self. A cave,
 Sir Lancelot, is hard by, with meats and drinks
 And forage for the horse, and flint for fire.
 But all about it flies a honeysuckle.
 Seek, till we find.’ And when they sought and found,
 Sir Gareth drank and ate, and all his life
 Past into sleep; on whom the maiden gazed.
 ’Sound sleep be thine! sound cause to sleep hast thou.
 Wake lusty! Seem I not as tender to him
 As any mother? Ay, but such a one
 As all day long hath rated at her child,
 And vext his day, but blesses him asleep—
 Good lord, how sweetly smells the honeysuckle
 In the hushed night, as if the world were one
 Of utter peace, and love, and gentleness!
 O Lancelot, Lancelot’—and she clapt her hands—
 ’Full merry am I to find my goodly knave
 Is knight and noble. See now, sworn have I,
 Else yon black felon had not let me pass,

To bring thee back to do the battle with him.
Thus an thou goest, he will fight thee first;
Who doubts thee victor? so will my knight-knave
Miss the full flower of this accomplishment.'
Said Lancelot, 'Peradventure he, you name,
May know my shield. Let Gareth, an he will,
Change his for mine, and take my charger, fresh,
Not to be spurred, loving the battle as well
As he that rides him.' 'Lancelot-like,' she said,
'Courteous in this, Lord Lancelot, as in all.'
And Gareth, wakening, fiercely clutched the shield;
'Ramp ye lance-splintering lions, on whom all spears
Are rotten sticks! ye seem agape to roar!
Yea, ramp and roar at leaving of your lord!—
Care not, good beasts, so well I care for you.
O noble Lancelot, from my hold on these
Streams virtue—fire—through one that will not shame
Even the shadow of Lancelot under shield.
Hence: let us go.'
Silent the silent field
They traversed. Arthur's harp though summer-wan,
In counter motion to the clouds, allured
The glance of Gareth dreaming on his liege.
A star shot: 'Lo,' said Gareth, 'the foe falls!'
An owl whoopt: 'Hark the victor pealing there!'
Suddenly she that rode upon his left
Clung to the shield that Lancelot lent him, crying,
'Yield, yield him this again: 'tis he must fight:
I curse the tongue that all through yesterday
Reviled thee, and hath wrought on Lancelot now
To lend thee horse and shield: wonders ye have done;
Miracles ye cannot: here is glory enow
In having flung the three: I see thee maimed,
Mangled: I swear thou canst not fling the fourth.'
'And wherefore, damsel? tell me all ye know.
You cannot scare me; nor rough face, or voice,
Brute bulk of limb, or boundless savagery
Appal me from the quest.'
'Nay, Prince,' she cried,
'God wot, I never looked upon the face,
Seeing he never rides abroad by day;
But watched him have I like a phantom pass
Chilling the night: nor have I heard the voice.
Always he made his mouthpiece of a page
Who came and went, and still reported him
As closing in himself the strength of ten,
And when his anger tare him, massacring
Man, woman, lad and girl—yea, the soft babe!
Some hold that he hath swallowed infant flesh,
Monster! O Prince, I went for Lancelot first,
The quest is Lancelot's: give him back the shield.'
Said Gareth laughing, 'An he fight for this,
Belike he wins it as the better man:
Thus—and not else!'

But Lancelot on him urged
All the devisings of their chivalry
When one might meet a mightier than himself;
How best to manage horse, lance, sword and shield,
And so fill up the gap where force might fail
With skill and fineness. Instant were his words.
Then Gareth, 'Here be rules. I know but one—
To dash against mine enemy and win.
Yet have I seen thee victor in the joust,
And seen thy way.' 'Heaven help thee,' sighed Lynette.

Then for a space, and under cloud that grew
To thunder-gloom palling all stars, they rode
In converse till she made her palfrey halt,
Lifted an arm, and softly whispered, 'There.'
And all the three were silent seeing, pitched
Beside the Castle Perilous on flat field,
A huge pavilion like a mountain peak
Sunder the glooming crimson on the marge,
Black, with black banner, and a long black horn
Beside it hanging; which Sir Gareth graspt,
And so, before the two could hinder him,
Sent all his heart and breath through all the horn.
Echoed the walls; a light twinkled; anon
Came lights and lights, and once again he blew;
Whereon were hollow tramlings up and down
And muffled voices heard, and shadows past;
Till high above him, circled with her maids,
The Lady Lyonors at a window stood,
Beautiful among lights, and waving to him
White hands, and courtesy; but when the Prince
Three times had blown—after long hush—at last—
The huge pavilion slowly yielded up,
Through those black foldings, that which housed therein.
High on a nightblack horse, in nightblack arms,
With white breast-bone, and barren ribs of Death,
And crowned with fleshless laughter—some ten steps—
In the half-light—through the dim dawn—advanced
The monster, and then paused, and spake no word.

But Gareth spake and all indignantly,
'Fool, for thou hast, men say, the strength of ten,
Canst thou not trust the limbs thy God hath given,
But must, to make the terror of thee more,
Trick thyself out in ghastly imageries
Of that which Life hath done with, and the clod,
Less dull than thou, will hide with mantling flowers
As if for pity?' But he spake no word;
Which set the horror higher: a maiden swooned;
The Lady Lyonors wrung her hands and wept,
As doomed to be the bride of Night and Death;
Sir Gareth's head prickled beneath his helm;
And even Sir Lancelot through his warm blood felt
Ice strike, and all that marked him were aghast.
At once Sir Lancelot's charger fiercely neighed,
And Death's dark war-horse bounded forward with him.

Then those that did not blink the terror, saw
That Death was cast to ground, and slowly rose.
But with one stroke Sir Gareth split the skull.
Half fell to right and half to left and lay.
Then with a stronger buffet he clove the helm
As throughly as the skull; and out from this
Issued the bright face of a blooming boy
Fresh as a flower new-born, and crying, 'Knight,
Slay me not: my three brethren bad me do it,
To make a horror all about the house,
And stay the world from Lady Lyonors.
They never dreamed the passes would be past.'
Answered Sir Gareth graciously to one
Not many a moon his younger, 'My fair child,
What madness made thee challenge the chief knight
Of Arthur's hall?' 'Fair Sir, they bad me do it.
They hate the King, and Lancelot, the King's friend,
They hoped to slay him somewhere on the stream,
They never dreamed the passes could be past.'
Then sprang the happier day from underground;
And Lady Lyonors and her house, with dance
And revel and song, made merry over Death,
As being after all their foolish fears
And horrors only proven a blooming boy.
So large mirth lived and Gareth won the quest.
And he that told the tale in older times
Says that Sir Gareth wedded Lyonors,
But he, that told it later, says Lynette.

The Marriage of Geraint

The brave Geraint, a knight of Arthur's court,
A tributary prince of Devon, one
Of that great Order of the Table Round,
Had married Enid, Yniol's only child,
And loved her, as he loved the light of Heaven.
And as the light of Heaven varies, now
At sunrise, now at sunset, now by night
With moon and trembling stars, so loved Geraint
To make her beauty vary day by day,
In crimsons and in purples and in gems.
And Enid, but to please her husband's eye,
Who first had found and loved her in a state
Of broken fortunes, daily fronted him
In some fresh splendour; and the Queen herself,
Grateful to Prince Geraint for service done,
Loved her, and often with her own white hands
Arrayed and decked her, as the loveliest,
Next after her own self, in all the court.
And Enid loved the Queen, and with true heart
Adored her, as the stateliest and the best
And loveliest of all women upon earth.
And seeing them so tender and so close,
Long in their common love rejoiced Geraint.
But when a rumour rose about the Queen,

Touching her guilty love for Lancelot,
Though yet there lived no proof, nor yet was heard
The world's loud whisper breaking into storm,
Not less Geraint believed it; and there fell
A horror on him, lest his gentle wife,
Through that great tenderness for Guinevere,
Had suffered, or should suffer any taint
In nature: wherefore going to the King,
He made this pretext, that his principedom lay
Close on the borders of a territory,
Wherein were bandit earls, and caitiff knights,
Assassins, and all flyers from the hand
Of Justice, and whatever loathes a law:
And therefore, till the King himself should please
To cleanse this common sewer of all his realm,
He craved a fair permission to depart,
And there defend his marches; and the King
Mused for a little on his plea, but, last,
Allowing it, the Prince and Enid rode,
And fifty knights rode with them, to the shores
Of Severn, and they past to their own land;
Where, thinking, that if ever yet was wife
True to her lord, mine shall be so to me,
He compassed her with sweet observances
And worship, never leaving her, and grew
Forgetful of his promise to the King,
Forgetful of the falcon and the hunt,
Forgetful of the tilt and tournament,
Forgetful of his glory and his name,
Forgetful of his principedom and its cares.
And this forgetfulness was hateful to her.
And by and by the people, when they met
In twos and threes, or fuller companies,
Began to scoff and jeer and babble of him
As of a prince whose manhood was all gone,
And molten down in mere uxoriousness.
And this she gathered from the people's eyes:
This too the women who attired her head,
To please her, dwelling on his boundless love,
Told Enid, and they saddened her the more:
And day by day she thought to tell Geraint,
But could not out of bashful delicacy;
While he that watched her sadden, was the more
Suspicious that her nature had a taint.

At last, it chanced that on a summer morn
(They sleeping each by either) the new sun
Beat through the blindless casement of the room,
And heated the strong warrior in his dreams;
Who, moving, cast the coverlet aside,
And bared the knotted column of his throat,
The massive square of his heroic breast,
And arms on which the standing muscle sloped,
As slopes a wild brook o'er a little stone,
Running too vehemently to break upon it.

And Enid woke and sat beside the couch,
Admiring him, and thought within herself,
Was ever man so grandly made as he?
Then, like a shadow, past the people's talk
And accusation of uxoriousness
Across her mind, and bowing over him,
Low to her own heart piteously she said:
'O noble breast and all-puissant arms,
Am I the cause, I the poor cause that men
Reproach you, saying all your force is gone?
I am the cause, because I dare not speak
And tell him what I think and what they say.
And yet I hate that he should linger here;
I cannot love my lord and not his name.
Far liefer had I gird his harness on him,
And ride with him to battle and stand by,
And watch his mightful hand striking great blows
At caitiffs and at wrongers of the world.
Far better were I laid in the dark earth,
Not hearing any more his noble voice,
Not to be folded more in these dear arms,
And darkened from the high light in his eyes,
Than that my lord through me should suffer shame.
Am I so bold, and could I so stand by,
And see my dear lord wounded in the strife,
And maybe pierced to death before mine eyes,
And yet not dare to tell him what I think,
And how men slur him, saying all his force
Is melted into mere effeminacy?
O me, I fear that I am no true wife.'

Half inwardly, half audibly she spoke,
And the strong passion in her made her weep
True tears upon his broad and naked breast,
And these awoke him, and by great mischance
He heard but fragments of her later words,
And that she feared she was not a true wife.
And then he thought, 'In spite of all my care,
For all my pains, poor man, for all my pains,
She is not faithful to me, and I see her
Weeping for some gay knight in Arthur's hall.'
Then though he loved and revered her too much
To dream she could be guilty of foul act,
Right through his manful breast darted the pang
That makes a man, in the sweet face of her
Whom he loves most, lonely and miserable.
At this he hurled his huge limbs out of bed,
And shook his drowsy squire awake and cried,
'My charger and her palfrey;' then to her,
'I will ride forth into the wilderness;
For though it seems my spurs are yet to win,
I have not fallen so low as some would wish.
And thou, put on thy worst and meanest dress
And ride with me.' And Enid asked, amazed,
'If Enid errs, let Enid learn her fault.'

But he, 'I charge thee, ask not, but obey.'
Then she bethought her of a faded silk,
A faded mantle and a faded veil,
And moving toward a cedarn cabinet,
Wherein she kept them folded reverently
With sprigs of summer laid between the folds,
She took them, and arrayed herself therein,
Remembering when first he came on her
Drest in that dress, and how he loved her in it,
And all her foolish fears about the dress,
And all his journey to her, as himself
Had told her, and their coming to the court.

For Arthur on the Whitsuntide before
Held court at old Caerleon upon Usk.
There on a day, he sitting high in hall,
Before him came a forester of Dean,
Wet from the woods, with notice of a hart
Taller than all his fellows, milky-white,
First seen that day: these things he told the King.
Then the good King gave order to let blow
His horns for hunting on the morrow morn.
And when the King petitioned for his leave
To see the hunt, allowed it easily.
So with the morning all the court were gone.
But Guinevere lay late into the morn,
Lost in sweet dreams, and dreaming of her love
For Lancelot, and forgetful of the hunt;
But rose at last, a single maiden with her,
Took horse, and forded Usk, and gained the wood;
There, on a little knoll beside it, stayed
Waiting to hear the hounds; but heard instead
A sudden sound of hoofs, for Prince Geraint,
Late also, wearing neither hunting-dress
Nor weapon, save a golden-hilted brand,
Came quickly flashing through the shallow ford
Behind them, and so galloped up the knoll.
A purple scarf, at either end whereof
There swung an apple of the purest gold,
Swayed round about him, as he galloped up
To join them, glancing like a dragon-fly
In summer suit and silks of holiday.
Low bowed the tributary Prince, and she,
Sweet and statelily, and with all grace
Of womanhood and queenhood, answered him:
'Late, late, Sir Prince,' she said, 'later than we!'
'Yea, noble Queen,' he answered, 'and so late
That I but come like you to see the hunt,
Not join it.' 'Therefore wait with me,' she said;
'For on this little knoll, if anywhere,
There is good chance that we shall hear the hounds:
Here often they break covert at our feet.'

And while they listened for the distant hunt,
And chiefly for the baying of Cavall,
King Arthur's hound of deepest mouth, there rode

Full slowly by a knight, lady, and dwarf;
Whereof the dwarf lagged latest, and the knight
Had vizor up, and showed a youthful face,
Imperious, and of haughtiest lineaments.
And Guinevere, not mindful of his face
In the King's hall, desired his name, and sent
Her maiden to demand it of the dwarf;
Who being vicious, old and irritable,
And doubling all his master's vice of pride,
Made answer sharply that she should not know.
'Then will I ask it of himself,' she said.
'Nay, by my faith, thou shalt not,' cried the dwarf;
'Thou art not worthy even to speak of him;'
And when she put her horse toward the knight,
Struck at her with his whip, and she returned
Indignant to the Queen; whereat Geraint
Exclaiming, 'Surely I will learn the name,'
Made sharply to the dwarf, and asked it of him,
Who answered as before; and when the Prince
Had put his horse in motion toward the knight,
Struck at him with his whip, and cut his cheek.
The Prince's blood spirted upon the scarf,
Dyeing it; and his quick, instinctive hand
Caught at the hilt, as to abolish him:
But he, from his exceeding manfulness
And pure nobility of temperament,
Wroth to be wroth at such a worm, refrained
From even a word, and so returning said:
'I will avenge this insult, noble Queen,
Done in your maiden's person to yourself:
And I will track this vermin to their earths:
For though I ride unarmed, I do not doubt
To find, at some place I shall come at, arms
On loan, or else for pledge; and, being found,
Then will I fight him, and will break his pride,
And on the third day will again be here,
So that I be not fallen in fight. Farewell.'
'Farewell, fair Prince,' answered the stately Queen.
'Be prosperous in this journey, as in all;
And may you light on all things that you love,
And live to wed with her whom first you love:
But ere you wed with any, bring your bride,
And I, were she the daughter of a king,
Yea, though she were a beggar from the hedge,
Will clothe her for her bridals like the sun.'
And Prince Geraint, now thinking that he heard
The noble hart at bay, now the far horn,
A little vexed at losing of the hunt,
A little at the vile occasion, rode,
By ups and downs, through many a grassy glade
And valley, with fixt eye following the three.
At last they issued from the world of wood,
And climbed upon a fair and even ridge,
And showed themselves against the sky, and sank.

And thither there came Geraint, and underneath
 Beheld the long street of a little town
 In a long valley, on one side whereof,
 White from the mason's hand, a fortress rose;
 And on one side a castle in decay,
 Beyond a bridge that spanned a dry ravine:
 And out of town and valley came a noise
 As of a broad brook o'er a shingly bed
 Brawling, or like a clamour of the rooks
 At distance, ere they settle for the night.

 And onward to the fortress rode the three,
 And entered, and were lost behind the walls.
 'So,' thought Geraint, 'I have tracked him to his earth.'
 And down the long street riding wearily,
 Found every hostel full, and everywhere
 Was hammer laid to hoof, and the hot hiss
 And bustling whistle of the youth who scoured
 His master's armour; and of such a one
 He asked, 'What means the tumult in the town?'
 Who told him, scouring still, 'The sparrow-hawk!'
 Then riding close behind an ancient churl,
 Who, smitten by the dusty sloping beam,
 Went sweating underneath a sack of corn,
 Asked yet once more what meant the hubbub here?
 Who answered gruffly, 'Ugh! the sparrow-hawk.'
 Then riding further past an armourer's,
 Who, with back turned, and bowed above his work,
 Sat riveting a helmet on his knee,
 He put the self-same query, but the man
 Not turning round, nor looking at him, said:
 'Friend, he that labours for the sparrow-hawk
 Has little time for idle questioners.'
 Whereat Geraint flashed into sudden spleen:
 'A thousand pips eat up your sparrow-hawk!
 Tits, wrens, and all winged nothings peck him dead!
 Ye think the rustic cackle of your bourg
 The murmur of the world! What is it to me?
 O wretched set of sparrows, one and all,
 Who pipe of nothing but of sparrow-hawks!
 Speak, if ye be not like the rest, hawk-mad,
 Where can I get me harbourage for the night?
 And arms, arms, arms to fight my enemy? Speak!'
 Whereat the armourer turning all amazed
 And seeing one so gay in purple silks,
 Came forward with the helmet yet in hand
 And answered, 'Pardon me, O stranger knight;
 We hold a tourney here tomorrow morn,
 And there is scanty time for half the work.
 Arms? truth! I know not: all are wanted here.
 Harbourage? truth, good truth, I know not, save,
 It may be, at Earl Yniol's, o'er the bridge
 Yonder.' He spoke and fell to work again.

 Then rode Geraint, a little spleenful yet,
 Across the bridge that spanned the dry ravine.

There musing sat the hoary-headed Earl,
(His dress a suit of frayed magnificence,
Once fit for feasts of ceremony) and said:
'Whither, fair son?' to whom Geraint replied,
'O friend, I seek a harbourage for the night.'
Then Yniol, 'Enter therefore and partake
The slender entertainment of a house
Once rich, now poor, but ever open-doored.'
'Thanks, venerable friend,' replied Geraint;
'So that ye do not serve me sparrow-hawks
For supper, I will enter, I will eat
With all the passion of a twelve hours' fast.'
Then sighed and smiled the hoary-headed Earl,
And answered, 'Graver cause than yours is mine
To curse this hedgerow thief, the sparrow-hawk:
But in, go in; for save yourself desire it,
We will not touch upon him even in jest.'
Then rode Geraint into the castle court,
His charger trampling many a prickly star
Of sprouted thistle on the broken stones.
He looked and saw that all was ruinous.
Here stood a shattered archway plumed with fern;
And here had fallen a great part of a tower,
Whole, like a crag that tumbles from the cliff,
And like a crag was gay with wilding flowers:
And high above a piece of turret stair,
Worn by the feet that now were silent, wound
Bare to the sun, and monstrous ivy-stems
Claspt the gray walls with hairy-fibred arms,
And sucked the joining of the stones, and looked
A knot, beneath, of snakes, aloft, a grove.
And while he waited in the castle court,
The voice of Enid, Yniol's daughter, rang
Clear through the open casement of the hall,
Singing; and as the sweet voice of a bird,
Heard by the lander in a lonely isle,
Moves him to think what kind of bird it is
That sings so delicately clear, and make
Conjecture of the plumage and the form;
So the sweet voice of Enid moved Geraint;
And made him like a man abroad at morn
When first the liquid note beloved of men
Comes flying over many a windy wave
To Britain, and in April suddenly
Breaks from a coppice gemmed with green and red,
And he suspends his converse with a friend,
Or it may be the labour of his hands,
To think or say, 'There is the nightingale.'
So fared it with Geraint, who thought and said,
'Here, by God's grace, is the one voice for me.'
It chanced the song that Enid sang was one
Of Fortune and her wheel, and Enid sang:
'Turn, Fortune, turn thy wheel and lower the proud;
Turn thy wild wheel through sunshine, storm, and cloud;

Thy wheel and thee we neither love nor hate.
'Turn, Fortune, turn thy wheel with smile or frown;
With that wild wheel we go not up or down;
Our hoard is little, but our hearts are great.
'Smile and we smile, the lords of many lands;
Frown and we smile, the lords of our own hands;
For man is man and master of his fate.
'Turn, turn thy wheel above the staring crowd;
Thy wheel and thou are shadows in the cloud;
Thy wheel and thee we neither love nor hate.'
'Hark, by the bird's song ye may learn the nest,'
Said Yniol; 'enter quickly.' Entering then,
Right o'er a mount of newly-fallen stones,
The dusky-raftered many-cobwebbed hall,
He found an ancient dame in dim brocade;
And near her, like a blossom vermeil-white,
That lightly breaks a faded flower-sheath,
Moved the fair Enid, all in faded silk,
Her daughter. In a moment thought Geraint,
'Here by God's rood is the one maid for me.'
But none spake word except the hoary Earl:
'Enid, the good knight's horse stands in the court;
Take him to stall, and give him corn, and then
Go to the town and buy us flesh and wine;
And we will make us merry as we may.
Our hoard is little, but our hearts are great.'
He spake: the Prince, as Enid past him, fain
To follow, strode a stride, but Yniol caught
His purple scarf, and held, and said, 'Forbear!
Rest! the good house, though ruined, O my son,
Endures not that her guest should serve himself.'
And reverencing the custom of the house
Geraint, from utter courtesy, forbore.
So Enid took his charger to the stall;
And after went her way across the bridge,
And reached the town, and while the Prince and Earl
Yet spoke together, came again with one,
A youth, that following with a costrel bore
The means of goodly welcome, flesh and wine.
And Enid brought sweet cakes to make them cheer,
And in her veil enfolded, manchet bread.
And then, because their hall must also serve
For kitchen, boiled the flesh, and spread the board,
And stood behind, and waited on the three.
And seeing her so sweet and serviceable,
Geraint had longing in him evermore
To stoop and kiss the tender little thumb,
That crost the trencher as she laid it down:
But after all had eaten, then Geraint,
For now the wine made summer in his veins,
Let his eye rove in following, or rest
On Enid at her lowly handmaid-work,
Now here, now there, about the dusky hall;
Then suddenly address the hoary Earl:

'Fair Host and Earl, I pray your courtesy;
This sparrow-hawk, what is he? tell me of him.
His name? but no, good faith, I will not have it:
For if he be the knight whom late I saw
Ride into that new fortress by your town,
White from the mason's hand, then have I sworn
From his own lips to have it—I am Geraint
Of Devon—for this morning when the Queen
Sent her own maiden to demand the name,
His dwarf, a vicious under-shapen thing,
Struck at her with his whip, and she returned
Indignant to the Queen; and then I swore
That I would track this caitiff to his hold,
And fight and break his pride, and have it of him.
And all unarmed I rode, and thought to find
Arms in your town, where all the men are mad;
They take the rustic murmur of their bourg
For the great wave that echoes round the world;
They would not hear me speak: but if ye know
Where I can light on arms, or if yourself
Should have them, tell me, seeing I have sworn
That I will break his pride and learn his name,
Avenging this great insult done the Queen.'

Then cried Earl Yniol, 'Art thou he indeed,
Geraint, a name far-sounded among men
For noble deeds? and truly I, when first
I saw you moving by me on the bridge,
Felt ye were somewhat, yea, and by your state
And presence might have guessed you one of those
That eat in Arthur's hall in Camelot.
Nor speak I now from foolish flattery;
For this dear child hath often heard me praise
Your feats of arms, and often when I paused
Hath asked again, and ever loved to hear;
So grateful is the noise of noble deeds
To noble hearts who see but acts of wrong:
O never yet had woman such a pair
Of suitors as this maiden: first Limours,
A creature wholly given to brawls and wine,
Drunk even when he wooed; and be he dead
I know not, but he past to the wild land.
The second was your foe, the sparrow-hawk,
My curse, my nephew—I will not let his name
Slip from my lips if I can help it—he,
When that I knew him fierce and turbulent
Refused her to him, then his pride awoke;
And since the proud man often is the mean,
He sowed a slander in the common ear,
Affirming that his father left him gold,
And in my charge, which was not rendered to him;
Bribed with large promises the men who served
About my person, the more easily
Because my means were somewhat broken into
Through open doors and hospitality;

Raised my own town against me in the night
 Before my Enid's birthday, sacked my house;
 From mine own earldom foully ousted me;
 Built that new fort to overawe my friends,
 For truly there are those who love me yet;
 And keeps me in this ruinous castle here,
 Where doubtless he would put me soon to death,
 But that his pride too much despises me:
 And I myself sometimes despise myself;
 For I have let men be, and have their way;
 Am much too gentle, have not used my power:
 Nor know I whether I be very base
 Or very manful, whether very wise
 Or very foolish; only this I know,
 That whatsoever evil happen to me,
 I seem to suffer nothing heart or limb,
 But can endure it all most patiently.'

'Well said, true heart,' replied Geraint, 'but arms,
 That if the sparrow-hawk, this nephew, fight
 In next day's tourney I may break his pride.'

And Yniol answered, 'Arms, indeed, but old
 And rusty, old and rusty, Prince Geraint,
 Are mine, and therefore at thy asking, thine.
 But in this tournament can no man tilt,
 Except the lady he loves best be there.
 Two forks are fixt into the meadow ground,
 And over these is placed a silver wand,
 And over that a golden sparrow-hawk,
 The prize of beauty for the fairest there.
 And this, what knight soever be in field
 Lays claim to for the lady at his side,
 And tilts with my good nephew thereupon,
 Who being apt at arms and big of bone
 Has ever won it for the lady with him,
 And toppling over all antagonism
 Has earned himself the name of sparrow-hawk.'
 But thou, that hast no lady, canst not fight.'

To whom Geraint with eyes all bright replied,
 Leaning a little toward him, 'Thy leave!
 Let me lay lance in rest, O noble host,
 For this dear child, because I never saw,
 Though having seen all beauties of our time,
 Nor can see elsewhere, anything so fair.
 And if I fall her name will yet remain
 Untarnished as before; but if I live,
 So aid me Heaven when at mine uttermost,
 As I will make her truly my true wife.'

Then, howsoever patient, Yniol's heart
 Danced in his bosom, seeing better days,
 And looking round he saw not Enid there,
 (Who hearing her own name had stolen away)
 But that old dame, to whom full tenderly
 And folding all her hand in his he said,
 'Mother, a maiden is a tender thing,

And best by her that bore her understood.
Go thou to rest, but ere thou go to rest
Tell her, and prove her heart toward the Prince.'

So spake the kindly-hearted Earl, and she
With frequent smile and nod departing found,
Half disarrayed as to her rest, the girl;
Whom first she kissed on either cheek, and then
On either shining shoulder laid a hand,
And kept her off and gazed upon her face,
And told them all their converse in the hall,
Proving her heart: but never light and shade
Coursed one another more on open ground
Beneath a troubled heaven, than red and pale
Across the face of Enid hearing her;
While slowly falling as a scale that falls,
When weight is added only grain by grain,
Sank her sweet head upon her gentle breast;
Nor did she lift an eye nor speak a word,
Rapt in the fear and in the wonder of it;
So moving without answer to her rest
She found no rest, and ever failed to draw
The quiet night into her blood, but lay
Contemplating her own unworthiness;
And when the pale and bloodless east began
To quicken to the sun, arose, and raised
Her mother too, and hand in hand they moved
Down to the meadow where the jousts were held,
And waited there for Yniol and Geraint.

And thither came the twain, and when Geraint
Beheld her first in field, awaiting him,
He felt, were she the prize of bodily force,
Himself beyond the rest pushing could move
The chair of Idris. Yniol's rusted arms
Were on his princely person, but through these
Princelike his bearing shone; and errant knights
And ladies came, and by and by the town
Flowed in, and settling circled all the lists.
And there they fixt the forks into the ground,
And over these they placed the silver wand,
And over that the golden sparrow-hawk.
Then Yniol's nephew, after trumpet blown,
Spake to the lady with him and proclaimed,
'Advance and take, as fairest of the fair,
What I these two years past have won for thee,
The prize of beauty.' Loudly spake the Prince,
'Forbear: there is a worthier,' and the knight
With some surprise and thrice as much disdain
Turned, and beheld the four, and all his face
Glowed like the heart of a great fire at Yule,
So burnt he was with passion, crying out,
'Do battle for it then,' no more; and thrice
They clashed together, and thrice they brake their spears.
Then each, dishorsed and drawing, lashed at each
So often and with such blows, that all the crowd

Wondered, and now and then from distant walls
There came a clapping as of phantom hands.
So twice they fought, and twice they breathed, and still
The dew of their great labour, and the blood
Of their strong bodies, flowing, drained their force.
But either's force was matched till Yniol's cry,
'Remember that great insult done the Queen,'
Increased Geraint's, who heaved his blade aloft,
And cracked the helmet through, and bit the bone,
And felled him, and set foot upon his breast,
And said, 'Thy name?' To whom the fallen man
Made answer, groaning, 'Edyrn, son of Nudd!
Ashamed am I that I should tell it thee.
My pride is broken: men have seen my fall.'
'Then, Edyrn, son of Nudd,' replied Geraint,
'These two things shalt thou do, or else thou diest.
First, thou thyself, with damsel and with dwarf,
Shalt ride to Arthur's court, and coming there,
Crave pardon for that insult done the Queen,
And shalt abide her judgment on it; next,
Thou shalt give back their earldom to thy kin.
These two things shalt thou do, or thou shalt die.'
And Edyrn answered, 'These things will I do,
For I have never yet been overthrown,
And thou hast overthrown me, and my pride
Is broken down, for Enid sees my fall!'
And rising up, he rode to Arthur's court,
And there the Queen forgave him easily.
And being young, he changed and came to loathe
His crime of traitor, slowly drew himself
Bright from his old dark life, and fell at last
In the great battle fighting for the King.
But when the third day from the hunting-morn
Made a low splendour in the world, and wings
Moved in her ivy, Enid, for she lay
With her fair head in the dim-yellow light,
Among the dancing shadows of the birds,
Woke and bethought her of her promise given
No later than last eve to Prince Geraint—
So bent he seemed on going the third day,
He would not leave her, till her promise given—
To ride with him this morning to the court,
And there be made known to the stately Queen,
And there be wedded with all ceremony.
At this she cast her eyes upon her dress,
And thought it never yet had looked so mean.
For as a leaf in mid-November is
To what it is in mid-October, seemed
The dress that now she looked on to the dress
She looked on ere the coming of Geraint.
And still she looked, and still the terror grew
Of that strange bright and dreadful thing, a court,
All staring at her in her faded silk:
And softly to her own sweet heart she said:

'This noble prince who won our earldom back,
So splendid in his acts and his attire,
Sweet heaven, how much I shall discredit him!
Would he could tarry with us here awhile,
But being so beholden to the Prince,
It were but little grace in any of us,
Bent as he seemed on going this third day,
To seek a second favour at his hands.
Yet if he could but tarry a day or two,
Myself would work eye dim, and finger lame,
Far liefer than so much discredit him.'

And Enid fell in longing for a dress
All branched and flowered with gold, a costly gift
Of her good mother, given her on the night
Before her birthday, three sad years ago,
That night of fire, when Edayrn sacked their house,
And scattered all they had to all the winds:
For while the mother showed it, and the two
Were turning and admiring it, the work
To both appeared so costly, rose a cry
That Edayrn's men were on them, and they fled
With little save the jewels they had on,
Which being sold and sold had bought them bread:
And Edayrn's men had caught them in their flight,
And placed them in this ruin; and she wished
The Prince had found her in her ancient home;
Then let her fancy flit across the past,
And roam the goodly places that she knew;
And last bethought her how she used to watch,
Near that old home, a pool of golden carp;
And one was patched and blurred and lustreless
Among his burnished brethren of the pool;
And half asleep she made comparison
Of that and these to her own faded self
And the gay court, and fell asleep again;
And dreamt herself was such a faded form
Among her burnished sisters of the pool;
But this was in the garden of a king;
And though she lay dark in the pool, she knew
That all was bright; that all about were birds
Of sunny plume in gilded trellis-work;
That all the turf was rich in plots that looked
Each like a garnet or a turkis in it;
And lords and ladies of the high court went
In silver tissue talking things of state;
And children of the King in cloth of gold
Glanced at the doors or gamboled down the walks;
And while she thought 'They will not see me,' came
A stately queen whose name was Guinevere,
And all the children in their cloth of gold
Ran to her, crying, 'If we have fish at all
Let them be gold; and charge the gardeners now
To pick the faded creature from the pool,
And cast it on the mixen that it die.'

And therewithal one came and seized on her,
And Enid started waking, with her heart
All overshadowed by the foolish dream,
And lo! it was her mother grasping her
To get her well awake; and in her hand
A suit of bright apparel, which she laid
Flat on the couch, and spoke exultingly:

'See here, my child, how fresh the colours look,
How fast they hold like colours of a shell
That keeps the wear and polish of the wave.
Why not? It never yet was worn, I trow:
Look on it, child, and tell me if ye know it.'

And Enid looked, but all confused at first,
Could scarce divide it from her foolish dream:
Then suddenly she knew it and rejoiced,
And answered, 'Yea, I know it; your good gift,
So sadly lost on that unhappy night;
Your own good gift!' 'Yea, surely,' said the dame,
'And gladly given again this happy morn.
For when the jousts were ended yesterday,
Went Yniol through the town, and everywhere
He found the sack and plunder of our house
All scattered through the houses of the town;
And gave command that all which once was ours
Should now be ours again: and yester-eve,
While ye were talking sweetly with your Prince,
Came one with this and laid it in my hand,
For love or fear, or seeking favour of us,
Because we have our earldom back again.
And yester-eve I would not tell you of it,
But kept it for a sweet surprise at morn.
Yea, truly is it not a sweet surprise?
For I myself unwillingly have worn
My faded suit, as you, my child, have yours,
And howsoever patient, Yniol his.
Ah, dear, he took me from a goodly house,
With store of rich apparel, sumptuous fare,
And page, and maid, and squire, and seneschal,
And pastime both of hawk and hound, and all
That appertains to noble maintenance.
Yea, and he brought me to a goodly house;
But since our fortune swerved from sun to shade,
And all through that young traitor, cruel need
Constrained us, but a better time has come;
So clothe yourself in this, that better fits
Our mended fortunes and a Prince's bride:
For though ye won the prize of fairest fair,
And though I heard him call you fairest fair,
Let never maiden think, however fair,
She is not fairer in new clothes than old.
And should some great court-lady say, the Prince
Hath picked a ragged-robin from the hedge,
And like a madman brought her to the court,
Then were ye shamed, and, worse, might shame the Prince

To whom we are beholden; but I know,
That when my dear child is set forth at her best,
That neither court nor country, though they sought
Through all the provinces like those of old
That lighted on Queen Esther, has her match.'

Here ceased the kindly mother out of breath;
And Enid listened brightening as she lay;
Then, as the white and glittering star of morn
Parts from a bank of snow, and by and by
Slips into golden cloud, the maiden rose,
And left her maiden couch, and robed herself,
Helped by the mother's careful hand and eye,
Without a mirror, in the gorgeous gown;
Who, after, turned her daughter round, and said,
She never yet had seen her half so fair;
And called her like that maiden in the tale,
Whom Gwydion made by glamour out of flowers
And sweeter than the bride of Cassivelaun,
Flur, for whose love the Roman Caesar first
Invaded Britain, 'But we beat him back,
As this great Prince invaded us, and we,
Not beat him back, but welcomed him with joy
And I can scarcely ride with you to court,
For old am I, and rough the ways and wild;
But Yniol goes, and I full oft shall dream
I see my princess as I see her now,
Clothed with my gift, and gay among the gay.'

But while the women thus rejoiced, Geraint
Woke where he slept in the high hall, and called
For Enid, and when Yniol made report
Of that good mother making Enid gay
In such apparel as might well beseem
His princess, or indeed the stately Queen,
He answered: 'Earl, entreat her by my love,
Albeit I give no reason but my wish,
That she ride with me in her faded silk.'
Yniol with that hard message went; it fell
Like flaws in summer laying lusty corn:
For Enid, all abashed she knew not why,
Dared not to glance at her good mother's face,
But silently, in all obedience,
Her mother silent too, nor helping her,
Laid from her limbs the costly-broidered gift,
And robed them in her ancient suit again,
And so descended. Never man rejoiced
More than Geraint to greet her thus attired;
And glancing all at once as keenly at her
As careful robins eye the delver's toil,
Made her cheek burn and either eyelid fall,
But rested with her sweet face satisfied;
Then seeing cloud upon the mother's brow,
Her by both hands she caught, and sweetly said,
'O my new mother, be not wroth or grieved
At thy new son, for my petition to her.

When late I left Caerleon, our great Queen,
In words whose echo lasts, they were so sweet,
Made promise, that whatever bride I brought,
Herself would clothe her like the sun in Heaven.
Thereafter, when I reached this ruined hall,
Beholding one so bright in dark estate,
I vowed that could I gain her, our fair Queen,
No hand but hers, should make your Enid burst
Sunlike from cloud—and likewise thought perhaps,
That service done so graciously would bind
The two together; fain I would the two
Should love each other: how can Enid find
A nobler friend? Another thought was mine;
I came among you here so suddenly,
That though her gentle presence at the lists
Might well have served for proof that I was loved,
I doubted whether daughter's tenderness,
Or easy nature, might not let itself
Be moulded by your wishes for her weal;
Or whether some false sense in her own self
Of my contrasting brightness, overbore
Her fancy dwelling in this dusky hall;
And such a sense might make her long for court
And all its perilous glories: and I thought,
That could I somehow prove such force in her
Linked with such love for me, that at a word
(No reason given her) she could cast aside
A splendour dear to women, new to her,
And therefore dearer; or if not so new,
Yet therefore tenfold dearer by the power
Of intermitted usage; then I felt
That I could rest, a rock in ebbs and flows,
Fixt on her faith. Now, therefore, I do rest,
A prophet certain of my prophecy,
That never shadow of mistrust can cross
Between us. Grant me pardon for my thoughts:
And for my strange petition I will make
Amends hereafter by some gaudy-day,
When your fair child shall wear your costly gift
Beside your own warm hearth, with, on her knees,
Who knows? another gift of the high God,
Which, maybe, shall have learned to lisp you thanks.'

He spoke: the mother smiled, but half in tears,
Then brought a mantle down and wrapt her in it,
And claspt and kissed her, and they rode away.

Now thrice that morning Guinevere had climbed
The giant tower, from whose high crest, they say,
Men saw the goodly hills of Somerset,
And white sails flying on the yellow sea;
But not to goodly hill or yellow sea
Looked the fair Queen, but up the vale of Usk,
By the flat meadow, till she saw them come;
And then descending met them at the gates,
Embraced her with all welcome as a friend,

And did her honour as the Prince's bride,
And clothed her for her bridals like the sun;
And all that week was old Caerleon gay,
For by the hands of Dubric, the high saint,
They twain were wedded with all ceremony.

And this was on the last year's Whitsuntide.
But Enid ever kept the faded silk,
Remembering how first he came on her,
Drest in that dress, and how he loved her in it,
And all her foolish fears about the dress,
And all his journey toward her, as himself
Had told her, and their coming to the court.

And now this morning when he said to her,
'Put on your worst and meanest dress,' she found
And took it, and arrayed herself therein.

Geraint and Enid

O purblind race of miserable men,
How many among us at this very hour
Do forge a life-long trouble for ourselves,
By taking true for false, or false for true;
Here, through the feeble twilight of this world
Groping, how many, until we pass and reach
That other, where we see as we are seen!

So fared it with Geraint, who issuing forth
That morning, when they both had got to horse,
Perhaps because he loved her passionately,
And felt that tempest brooding round his heart,
Which, if he spoke at all, would break perforce
Upon a head so dear in thunder, said:
'Not at my side. I charge thee ride before,
Ever a good way on before; and this
I charge thee, on thy duty as a wife,
Whatever happens, not to speak to me,
No, not a word!' and Enid was aghast;
And forth they rode, but scarce three paces on,
When crying out, 'Effeminate as I am,
I will not fight my way with gilded arms,
All shall be iron;' he loosed a mighty purse,
Hung at his belt, and hurled it toward the squire.
So the last sight that Enid had of home
Was all the marble threshold flashing, strown
With gold and scattered coinage, and the squire
Chafing his shoulder: then he cried again,
'To the wilds!' and Enid leading down the tracks
Through which he bad her lead him on, they past
The marches, and by bandit-haunted holds,
Gray swamps and pools, waste places of the hern,
And wildernesses, perilous paths, they rode:
Round was their pace at first, but slackened soon:
A stranger meeting them had surely thought
They rode so slowly and they looked so pale,
That each had suffered some exceeding wrong.
For he was ever saying to himself,

'O I that wasted time to tend upon her,
To compass her with sweet observances,
To dress her beautifully and keep her true'—
And there he broke the sentence in his heart
Abruptly, as a man upon his tongue
May break it, when his passion masters him.
And she was ever praying the sweet heavens
To save her dear lord whole from any wound.
And ever in her mind she cast about
For that unnoticed failing in herself,
Which made him look so cloudy and so cold;
Till the great plover's human whistle amazed
Her heart, and glancing round the waste she feared
In ever wavering brake an ambuscade.
Then thought again, 'If there be such in me,
I might amend it by the grace of Heaven,
If he would only speak and tell me of it.'

But when the fourth part of the day was gone,
Then Enid was aware of three tall knights
On horseback, wholly armed, behind a rock
In shadow, waiting for them, caitiffs all;
And heard one crying to his fellow, 'Look,
Here comes a laggard hanging down his head,
Who seems no bolder than a beaten hound;
Come, we will slay him and will have his horse
And armour, and his damsel shall be ours.'

Then Enid pondered in her heart, and said:
'I will go back a little to my lord,
And I will tell him all their caitiff talk;
For, be he wroth even to slaying me,
Far liefer by his dear hand had I die,
Than that my lord should suffer loss or shame.'

Then she went back some paces of return,
Met his full frown timidly firm, and said;
'My lord, I saw three bandits by the rock
Waiting to fall on you, and heard them boast
That they would slay you, and possess your horse
And armour, and your damsel should be theirs.'

He made a wrathful answer: 'Did I wish
Your warning or your silence? one command
I laid upon you, not to speak to me,
And thus ye keep it! Well then, look—for now,
Whether ye wish me victory or defeat,
Long for my life, or hunger for my death,
Yourself shall see my vigour is not lost.'

Then Enid waited pale and sorrowful,
And down upon him bare the bandit three.
And at the midmost charging, Prince Geraint
Drove the long spear a cubit through his breast
And out beyond; and then against his brace
Of comrades, each of whom had broken on him
A lance that splintered like an icicle,
Swung from his brand a windy buffet out
Once, twice, to right, to left, and stunned the twain

Or slew them, and dismounting like a man
That skins the wild beast after slaying him,
Stript from the three dead wolves of woman born
The three gay suits of armour which they wore,
And let the bodies lie, but bound the suits
Of armour on their horses, each on each,
And tied the bridle-reins of all the three
Together, and said to her, 'Drive them on
Before you,' and she drove them through the waste.

He followed nearer; ruth began to work
Against his anger in him, while he watched
The being he loved best in all the world,
With difficulty in mild obedience
Driving them on: he fain had spoken to her,
And loosed in words of sudden fire the wrath
And smouldered wrong that burnt him all within;
But evermore it seemed an easier thing
At once without remorse to strike her dead,
Than to cry 'Halt,' and to her own bright face
Accuse her of the least immodesty:
And thus tongue-tied, it made him wroth the more
That she could speak whom his own ear had heard
Call herself false: and suffering thus he made
Minutes an age: but in scarce longer time
Than at Caerleon the full-tided Usk,
Before he turn to fall seaward again,
Pauses, did Enid, keeping watch, behold
In the first shallow shade of a deep wood,
Before a gloom of stubborn-shafted oaks,
Three other horsemen waiting, wholly armed,
Whereof one seemed far larger than her lord,
And shook her pulses, crying, 'Look, a prize!
Three horses and three goodly suits of arms,
And all in charge of whom? a girl: set on.'
'Nay,' said the second, 'yonder comes a knight.'
The third, 'A craven; how he hangs his head.'
The giant answered merrily, 'Yea, but one?
Wait here, and when he passes fall upon him.'

And Enid pondered in her heart and said,
'I will abide the coming of my lord,
And I will tell him all their villainy.
My lord is weary with the fight before,
And they will fall upon him unawares.
I needs must disobey him for his good;
How should I dare obey him to his harm?
Needs must I speak, and though he kill me for it,
I save a life dearer to me than mine.'

And she abode his coming, and said to him
With timid firmness, 'Have I leave to speak?'
He said, 'Ye take it, speaking,' and she spoke.
'There lurk three villains yonder in the wood,
And each of them is wholly armed, and one
Is larger-limbed than you are, and they say
That they will fall upon you while ye pass.'

To which he flung a wrathful answer back:
'And if there were an hundred in the wood,
And every man were larger-limbed than I,
And all at once should sally out upon me,
I swear it would not ruffle me so much
As you that not obey me. Stand aside,
And if I fall, cleave to the better man.'

And Enid stood aside to wait the event,
Not dare to watch the combat, only breathe
Short fits of prayer, at every stroke a breath.
And he, she dreaded most, bare down upon him.
Aimed at the helm, his lance erred; but Geraint's,
A little in the late encounter strained,
Struck through the bulky bandit's corselet home,
And then brake short, and down his enemy rolled,
And there lay still; as he that tells the tale
Saw once a great piece of a promontory,
That had a sapling growing on it, slide
From the long shore-cliff's windy walls to the beach,
And there lie still, and yet the sapling grew:
So lay the man transfixt. His craven pair
Of comrades making slowlier at the Prince,
When now they saw their bulwark fallen, stood;
On whom the victor, to confound them more,
Spurred with his terrible war-cry; for as one,
That listens near a torrent mountain-brook,
All through the crash of the near cataract hears
The drumming thunder of the huger fall
At distance, were the soldiers wont to hear
His voice in battle, and be kindled by it,
And foemen scared, like that false pair who turned
Flying, but, overtaken, died the death
Themselves had wrought on many an innocent.

Thereon Geraint, dismounting, picked the lance
That pleased him best, and drew from those dead wolves
Their three gay suits of armour, each from each,
And bound them on their horses, each on each,
And tied the bridle-reins of all the three
Together, and said to her, 'Drive them on
Before you,' and she drove them through the wood.

He followed nearer still: the pain she had
To keep them in the wild ways of the wood,
Two sets of three laden with jingling arms,
Together, served a little to disedge
The sharpness of that pain about her heart:
And they themselves, like creatures gently born
But into bad hands fallen, and now so long
By bandits groomed, pricked their light ears, and felt
Her low firm voice and tender government.

So through the green gloom of the wood they past,
And issuing under open heavens beheld
A little town with towers, upon a rock,
And close beneath, a meadow gemlike chased
In the brown wild, and mowers mowing in it:

And down a rocky pathway from the place
There came a fair-haired youth, that in his hand
Bare victual for the mowers: and Geraint
Had ruth again on Enid looking pale:
Then, moving downward to the meadow ground,
He, when the fair-haired youth came by him, said,
'Friend, let her eat; the damsel is so faint.'
'Yea, willingly,' replied the youth; 'and thou,
My lord, eat also, though the fare is coarse,
And only meet for mowers;' then set down
His basket, and dismounting on the sward
They let the horses graze, and ate themselves.
And Enid took a little delicately,
Less having stomach for it than desire
To close with her lord's pleasure; but Geraint
Ate all the mowers' victual unawares,
And when he found all empty, was amazed;
And 'Boy,' said he, 'I have eaten all, but take
A horse and arms for guerdon; choose the best.'
He, reddening in extremity of delight,
'My lord, you overpay me fifty-fold.'
'Ye will be all the wealthier,' cried the Prince.
'I take it as free gift, then,' said the boy,
'Not guerdon; for myself can easily,
While your good damsel rests, return, and fetch
Fresh victual for these mowers of our Earl;
For these are his, and all the field is his,
And I myself am his; and I will tell him
How great a man thou art: he loves to know
When men of mark are in his territory:
And he will have thee to his palace here,
And serve thee costlier than with mowers' fare.'
Then said Geraint, 'I wish no better fare:
I never ate with angrier appetite
Than when I left your mowers dinnerless.
And into no Earl's palace will I go.
I know, God knows, too much of palaces!
And if he want me, let him come to me.
But hire us some fair chamber for the night,
And stalling for the horses, and return
With victual for these men, and let us know.'
'Yea, my kind lord,' said the glad youth, and went,
Held his head high, and thought himself a knight,
And up the rocky pathway disappeared,
Leading the horse, and they were left alone.
But when the Prince had brought his errant eyes
Home from the rock, sideways he let them glance
At Enid, where she droopt: his own false doom,
That shadow of mistrust should never cross
Betwixt them, came upon him, and he sighed;
Then with another humorous ruth remarked
The lusty mowers labouring dinnerless,
And watched the sun blaze on the turning scythe,
And after nodded sleepily in the heat.

But she, remembering her old ruined hall,
And all the windy clamour of the daws
About her hollow turret, plucked the grass
There growing longest by the meadow's edge,
And into many a listless annulet,
Now over, now beneath her marriage ring,
Wove and unwove it, till the boy returned
And told them of a chamber, and they went;
Where, after saying to her, 'If ye will,
Call for the woman of the house,' to which
She answered, 'Thanks, my lord;' the two remained
Apart by all the chamber's width, and mute
As two creatures voiceless through the fault of birth,
Or two wild men supporters of a shield,
Painted, who stare at open space, nor glance
The one at other, parted by the shield.

On a sudden, many a voice along the street,
And heel against the pavement echoing, burst
Their drowse; and either started while the door,
Pushed from without, drave backward to the wall,
And midmost of a rout of roisterers,
Femininely fair and dissolutely pale,
Her suitor in old years before Geraint,
Entered, the wild lord of the place, Limours.
He moving up with pliant courtliness,
Greeted Geraint full face, but stealthily,
In the mid-warmth of welcome and graspt hand,
Found Enid with the corner of his eye,
And knew her sitting sad and solitary.
Then cried Geraint for wine and goodly cheer
To feed the sudden guest, and sumptuously
According to his fashion, bad the host
Call in what men soever were his friends,
And feast with these in honour of their Earl;
'And care not for the cost; the cost is mine.'

And wine and food were brought, and Earl Limours
Drank till he jested with all ease, and told
Free tales, and took the word and played upon it,
And made it of two colours; for his talk,
When wine and free companions kindled him,
Was wont to glance and sparkle like a gem
Of fifty facets; thus he moved the Prince
To laughter and his comrades to applause.
Then, when the Prince was merry, asked Limours,
'Your leave, my lord, to cross the room, and speak
To your good damsel there who sits apart,
And seems so lonely?' 'My free leave,' he said;
'Get her to speak: she doth not speak to me.'
Then rose Limours, and looking at his feet,
Like him who tries the bridge he fears may fail,
Crost and came near, lifted adoring eyes,
Bowed at her side and uttered whisperingly:
'Enid, the pilot star of my lone life,
Enid, my early and my only love,

Enid, the loss of whom hath turned me wild—
What chance is this? how is it I see you here?
Ye are in my power at last, are in my power.
Yet fear me not: I call mine own self wild,
But keep a touch of sweet civility
Here in the heart of waste and wilderness.
I thought, but that your father came between,
In former days you saw me favourably.
And if it were so do not keep it back:
Make me a little happier: let me know it:
Owe you me nothing for a life half-lost?
Yea, yea, the whole dear debt of all you are.
And, Enid, you and he, I see with joy,
Ye sit apart, you do not speak to him,
You come with no attendance, page or maid,
To serve you—doth he love you as of old?
For, call it lovers' quarrels, yet I know
Though men may bicker with the things they love,
They would not make them laughable in all eyes,
Not while they loved them; and your wretched dress,
A wretched insult on you, dumbly speaks
Your story, that this man loves you no more.
Your beauty is no beauty to him now:
A common chance—right well I know it—palled—
For I know men: nor will ye win him back,
For the man's love once gone never returns.
But here is one who loves you as of old;
With more exceeding passion than of old:
Good, speak the word: my followers ring him round:
He sits unarmed; I hold a finger up;
They understand: nay; I do not mean blood:
Nor need ye look so scared at what I say:
My malice is no deeper than a moat,
No stronger than a wall: there is the keep;
He shall not cross us more; speak but the word:
Or speak it not; but then by Him that made me
The one true lover whom you ever owned,
I will make use of all the power I have.
O pardon me! the madness of that hour,
When first I parted from thee, moves me yet.'

At this the tender sound of his own voice
And sweet self-pity, or the fancy of it,
Made his eye moist; but Enid feared his eyes,
Moist as they were, wine-heated from the feast;
And answered with such craft as women use,
Guilty or guiltless, to stave off a chance
That breaks upon them perilously, and said:

'Earl, if you love me as in former years,
And do not practise on me, come with morn,
And snatch me from him as by violence;
Leave me tonight: I am weary to the death.'

Low at leave-taking, with his brandished plume
Brushing his instep, bowed the all-amorous Earl,
And the stout Prince bad him a loud good-night.

He moving homeward babbled to his men,
How Enid never loved a man but him,
Nor cared a broken egg-shell for her lord.
But Enid left alone with Prince Geraint,
Debating his command of silence given,
And that she now perforce must violate it,
Held commune with herself, and while she held
He fell asleep, and Enid had no heart
To wake him, but hung o'er him, wholly pleased
To find him yet unwounded after fight,
And hear him breathing low and equally.
Anon she rose, and stepping lightly, heaped
The pieces of his armour in one place,
All to be there against a sudden need;
Then dozed awhile herself, but overtoiled
By that day's grief and travel, evermore
Seemed catching at a rootless thorn, and then
Went slipping down horrible precipices,
And strongly striking out her limbs awoke;
Then thought she heard the wild Earl at the door,
With all his rout of random followers,
Sound on a dreadful trumpet, summoning her;
Which was the red cock shouting to the light,
As the gray dawn stole o'er the dewy world,
And glimmered on his armour in the room.
And once again she rose to look at it,
But touched it unawares: jangling, the casque
Fell, and he started up and stared at her.
Then breaking his command of silence given,
She told him all that Earl Limours had said,
Except the passage that he loved her not;
Nor left untold the craft herself had used;
But ended with apology so sweet,
Low-spoken, and of so few words, and seemed
So justified by that necessity,
That though he thought 'was it for him she wept
In Devon?' he but gave a wrathful groan,
Saying, 'Your sweet faces make good fellows fools
And traitors. Call the host and bid him bring
Charger and palfrey.' So she glided out
Among the heavy breathings of the house,
And like a household Spirit at the walls
Beat, till she woke the sleepers, and returned:
Then tending her rough lord, though all unasked,
In silence, did him service as a squire;
Till issuing armed he found the host and cried,
'Thy reckoning, friend?' and ere he learnt it, 'Take
Five horses and their armours;' and the host
Suddenly honest, answered in amaze,
'My lord, I scarce have spent the worth of one!'
'Ye will be all the wealthier,' said the Prince,
And then to Enid, 'Forward! and today
I charge you, Enid, more especially,
What thing soever ye may hear, or see,

Or fancy (though I count it of small use
To charge you) that ye speak not but obey.'
And Enid answered, 'Yea, my lord, I know
Your wish, and would obey; but riding first,
I hear the violent threats you do not hear,
I see the danger which you cannot see:
Then not to give you warning, that seems hard;
Almost beyond me: yet I would obey.'
'Yea so,' said he, 'do it: be not too wise;
Seeing that ye are wedded to a man,
Not all mismated with a yawning clown,
But one with arms to guard his head and yours,
With eyes to find you out however far,
And ears to hear you even in his dreams.'
With that he turned and looked as keenly at her
As careful robins eye the delver's toil;
And that within her, which a wanton fool,
Or hasty judger would have called her guilt,
Made her cheek burn and either eyelid fall.
And Geraint looked and was not satisfied.
Then forward by a way which, beaten broad,
Led from the territory of false Limours
To the waste earldom of another earl,
Doorm, whom his shaking vassals called the Bull,
Went Enid with her sullen follower on.
Once she looked back, and when she saw him ride
More near by many a rood than yestermorn,
It wellnigh made her cheerful; till Geraint
Waving an angry hand as who should say
'Ye watch me,' saddened all her heart again.
But while the sun yet beat a dewy blade,
The sound of many a heavily-galloping hoof
Smote on her ear, and turning round she saw
Dust, and the points of lances bicker in it.
Then not to disobey her lord's behest,
And yet to give him warning, for he rode
As if he heard not, moving back she held
Her finger up, and pointed to the dust.
At which the warrior in his obstinacy,
Because she kept the letter of his word,
Was in a manner pleased, and turning, stood.
And in the moment after, wild Limours,
Borne on a black horse, like a thunder-cloud
Whose skirts are loosened by the breaking storm,
Half ridden off with by the thing he rode,
And all in passion uttering a dry shriek,
Dashed down on Geraint, who closed with him, and bore
Down by the length of lance and arm beyond
The crupper, and so left him stunned or dead,
And overthrew the next that followed him,
And blindly rushed on all the rout behind.
But at the flash and motion of the man
They vanished panic-stricken, like a shoal
Of darting fish, that on a summer morn

Adown the crystal dykes at Camelot
Come slipping o'er their shadows on the sand,
But if a man who stands upon the brink
But lift a shining hand against the sun,
There is not left the twinkle of a fin
Betwixt the cressy islets white in flower;
So, scared but at the motion of the man,
Fled all the boon companions of the Earl,
And left him lying in the public way;
So vanish friendships only made in wine.

Then like a stormy sunlight smiled Geraint,
Who saw the chargers of the two that fell
Start from their fallen lords, and wildly fly,
Mixt with the flyers. 'Horse and man,' he said,
'All of one mind and all right-honest friends!
Not a hoof left: and I methinks till now
Was honest—paid with horses and with arms;
I cannot steal or plunder, no nor beg:
And so what say ye, shall we strip him there
Your lover? has your palfrey heart enough
To bear his armour? shall we fast, or dine?
No?—then do thou, being right honest, pray
That we may meet the horsemen of Earl Doorm,
I too would still be honest.' Thus he said:
And sadly gazing on her bridle-reins,
And answering not one word, she led the way.

But as a man to whom a dreadful loss
Falls in a far land and he knows it not,
But coming back he learns it, and the loss
So pains him that he sickens nigh to death;
So fared it with Geraint, who being pricked
In combat with the follower of Limours,
Bled underneath his armour secretly,
And so rode on, nor told his gentle wife
What ailed him, hardly knowing it himself,
Till his eye darkened and his helmet wagged;
And at a sudden swerving of the road,
Though happily down on a bank of grass,
The Prince, without a word, from his horse fell.

And Enid heard the clashing of his fall,
Suddenly came, and at his side all pale
Dismounting, loosed the fastenings of his arms,
Nor let her true hand falter, nor blue eye
Moisten, till she had lighted on his wound,
And tearing off her veil of faded silk
Had bared her forehead to the blistering sun,
And swathed the hurt that drained her dear lord's life.
Then after all was done that hand could do,
She rested, and her desolation came
Upon her, and she wept beside the way.

And many past, but none regarded her,
For in that realm of lawless turbulence,
A woman weeping for her murdered mate
Was cared as much for as a summer shower:

One took him for a victim of Earl Doorm,
Nor dared to waste a perilous pity on him:
Another hurrying past, a man-at-arms,
Rode on a mission to the bandit Earl;
Half whistling and half singing a coarse song,
He drove the dust against her veiless eyes:
Another, flying from the wrath of Doorm
Before an ever-fancied arrow, made
The long way smoke beneath him in his fear;
At which her palfrey whinnying lifted heel,
And scoured into the coppices and was lost,
While the great charger stood, grieved like a man.

But at the point of noon the huge Earl Doorm,
Broad-faced with under-fringe of russet beard,
Bound on a foray, rolling eyes of prey,
Came riding with a hundred lances up;
But ere he came, like one that hails a ship,
Cried out with a big voice, 'What, is he dead?'
'No, no, not dead!' she answered in all haste.
'Would some of your people take him up,
And bear him hence out of this cruel sun?
Most sure am I, quite sure, he is not dead.'

Then said Earl Doorm: 'Well, if he be not dead,
Why wail ye for him thus? ye seem a child.
And be he dead, I count you for a fool;
Your wailing will not quicken him: dead or not,
Ye mar a comely face with idiot tears.
Yet, since the face is comely—some of you,
Here, take him up, and bear him to our hall:
An if he live, we will have him of our band;
And if he die, why earth has earth enough
To hide him. See ye take the charger too,
A noble one.'

He spake, and past away,
But left two brawny spearmen, who advanced,
Each growling like a dog, when his good bone
Seems to be plucked at by the village boys
Who love to vex him eating, and he fears
To lose his bone, and lays his foot upon it,
Gnawing and growling: so the ruffians growled,
Fearing to lose, and all for a dead man,
Their chance of booty from the morning's raid,
Yet raised and laid him on a litter-bier,
Such as they brought upon their forays out
For those that might be wounded; laid him on it
All in the hollow of his shield, and took
And bore him to the naked hall of Doorm,
(His gentle charger following him unled)
And cast him and the bier in which he lay
Down on an oaken settle in the hall,
And then departed, hot in haste to join
Their luckier mates, but growling as before,
And cursing their lost time, and the dead man,
And their own Earl, and their own souls, and her.

They might as well have blest her: she was deaf
To blessing or to cursing save from one.

So for long hours sat Enid by her lord,
There in the naked hall, propping his head,
And chafing his pale hands, and calling to him.
Till at the last he wakened from his swoon,
And found his own dear bride propping his head,
And chafing his faint hands, and calling to him;
And felt the warm tears falling on his face;
And said to his own heart, 'She weeps for me.'
And yet lay still, and feigned himself as dead,
That he might prove her to the uttermost,
And say to his own heart, 'She weeps for me.'

But in the falling afternoon returned
The huge Earl Doorm with plunder to the hall.
His lusty spearmen followed him with noise:
Each hurling down a heap of things that rang
Against his pavement, cast his lance aside,
And doffed his helm: and then there fluttered in,
Half-bold, half-frighted, with dilated eyes,
A tribe of women, dressed in many hues,
And mingled with the spearmen: and Earl Doorm
Struck with a knife's haft hard against the board,
And called for flesh and wine to feed his spears.
And men brought in whole hogs and quarter beeves,
And all the hall was dim with steam of flesh:
And none spake word, but all sat down at once,
And ate with tumult in the naked hall,
Feeding like horses when you hear them feed;
Till Enid shrank far back into herself,
To shun the wild ways of the lawless tribe.
But when Earl Doorm had eaten all he would,
He rolled his eyes about the hall, and found
A damsel drooping in a corner of it.
Then he remembered her, and how she wept;
And out of her there came a power upon him;
And rising on the sudden he said, 'Eat!
I never yet beheld a thing so pale.
God's curse, it makes me mad to see you weep.
Eat! Look yourself. Good luck had your good man,
For were I dead who is it would weep for me?
Sweet lady, never since I first drew breath
Have I beheld a lily like yourself.
And so there lived some colour in your cheek,
There is not one among my gentlewomen
Were fit to wear your slipper for a glove.
But listen to me, and by me be ruled,
And I will do the thing I have not done,
For ye shall share my earldom with me, girl,
And we will live like two birds in one nest,
And I will fetch you forage from all fields,
For I compel all creatures to my will.'

He spoke: the brawny spearman let his cheek
Bulge with the unswallowed piece, and turning stared;

While some, whose souls the old serpent long had drawn
Down, as the worm draws in the withered leaf
And makes it earth, hissed each at other's ear
What shall not be recorded—women they,
Women, or what had been those gracious things,
But now desired the humbling of their best,
Yea, would have helped him to it: and all at once
They hated her, who took no thought of them,
But answered in low voice, her meek head yet
Drooping, 'I pray you of your courtesies,
He being as he is, to let me be.'

She spake so low he hardly heard her speak,
But like a mighty patron, satisfied
With what himself had done so graciously,
Assumed that she had thanked him, adding, 'Yea,
Eat and be glad, for I account you mine.'

She answered meekly, 'How should I be glad
Henceforth in all the world at anything,
Until my lord arise and look upon me?'

Here the huge Earl cried out upon her talk,
As all but empty heart and weariness
And sickly nothing; suddenly seized on her,
And bare her by main violence to the board,
And thrust the dish before her, crying, 'Eat.'

'No, no,' said Enid, vext, 'I will not eat
Till yonder man upon the bier arise,
And eat with me.' 'Drink, then,' he answered. 'Here!'
(And filled a horn with wine and held it to her.)
'Lo! I, myself, when flushed with fight, or hot,
God's curse, with anger—often I myself,
Before I well have drunken, scarce can eat:
Drink therefore and the wine will change thy will.'

'Not so,' she cried, 'by Heaven, I will not drink
Till my dear lord arise and bid me do it,
And drink with me; and if he rise no more,
I will not look at wine until I die.'

At this he turned all red and paced his hall,
Now gnawed his under, now his upper lip,
And coming up close to her, said at last:
'Girl, for I see ye scorn my courtesies,
Take warning; yonder man is surely dead;
And I compel all creatures to my will.
Not eat nor drink? And wherefore wail for one,
Who put your beauty to this flout and scorn
By dressing it in rags? Amazed am I,
Beholding how ye butt against my wish,
That I forbear you thus: cross me no more.
At least put off to please me this poor gown,
This silken rag, this beggar-woman's weed:
I love that beauty should go beautifully:
For see ye not my gentlewomen here,
How gay, how suited to the house of one
Who loves that beauty should go beautifully?
Rise therefore; robe yourself in this: obey.'

He spoke, and one among his gentlewomen
Displayed a splendid silk of foreign loom,
Where like a shoaling sea the lovely blue
Played into green, and thicker down the front
With jewels than the sward with drops of dew,
When all night long a cloud clings to the hill,
And with the dawn ascending lets the day
Strike where it clung: so thickly shone the gems.

But Enid answered, harder to be moved
Than hardest tyrants in their day of power,
With life-long injuries burning unavenged,
And now their hour has come; and Enid said:

'In this poor gown my dear lord found me first,
And loved me serving in my father's hall:
In this poor gown I rode with him to court,
And there the Queen arrayed me like the sun:
In this poor gown he bad me clothe myself,
When now we rode upon this fatal quest
Of honour, where no honour can be gained:
And this poor gown I will not cast aside
Until himself arise a living man,
And bid me cast it. I have griefs enough:
Pray you be gentle, pray you let me be:
I never loved, can never love but him:
Yea, God, I pray you of your gentleness,
He being as he is, to let me be.'

Then strode the brute Earl up and down his hall,
And took his russet beard between his teeth;
Last, coming up quite close, and in his mood
Crying, 'I count it of no more avail,
Dame, to be gentle than ungentle with you;
Take my salute,' unknightly with flat hand,
However lightly, smote her on the cheek.

Then Enid, in her utter helplessness,
And since she thought, 'He had not dared to do it,
Except he surely knew my lord was dead,'
Sent forth a sudden sharp and bitter cry,
As of a wild thing taken in the trap,
Which sees the trapper coming through the wood.

This heard Geraint, and grasping at his sword,
(It lay beside him in the hollow shield),
Made but a single bound, and with a sweep of it
Shore through the swarthy neck, and like a ball
The russet-bearded head rolled on the floor.
So died Earl Doorm by him he counted dead.
And all the men and women in the hall
Rose when they saw the dead man rise, and fled
Yelling as from a spectre, and the two
Were left alone together, and he said:

'Enid, I have used you worse than that dead man;
Done you more wrong: we both have undergone
That trouble which has left me thrice your own:
Henceforward I will rather die than doubt.

And here I lay this penance on myself,
Not, though mine own ears heard you yesternorn—
You thought me sleeping, but I heard you say,
I heard you say, that you were no true wife:
I swear I will not ask your meaning in it:
I do believe yourself against yourself,
And will henceforward rather die than doubt.’
And Enid could not say one tender word,
She felt so blunt and stupid at the heart:
She only prayed him, ‘Fly, they will return
And slay you; fly, your charger is without,
My palfrey lost.’ ‘Then, Enid, shall you ride
Behind me.’ ‘Yea,’ said Enid, ‘let us go.’
And moving out they found the stately horse,
Who now no more a vassal to the thief,
But free to stretch his limbs in lawful fight,
Neighed with all gladness as they came, and stooped
With a low whinny toward the pair: and she
Kissed the white star upon his noble front,
Glad also; then Geraint upon the horse
Mounted, and reached a hand, and on his foot
She set her own and climbed; he turned his face
And kissed her climbing, and she cast her arms
About him, and at once they rode away.
And never yet, since high in Paradise
O’er the four rivers the first roses blew,
Came purer pleasure unto mortal kind
Than lived through her, who in that perilous hour
Put hand to hand beneath her husband’s heart,
And felt him hers again: she did not weep,
But o’er her meek eyes came a happy mist
Like that which kept the heart of Eden green
Before the useful trouble of the rain:
Yet not so misty were her meek blue eyes
As not to see before them on the path,
Right in the gateway of the bandit hold,
A knight of Arthur’s court, who laid his lance
In rest, and made as if to fall upon him.
Then, fearing for his hurt and loss of blood,
She, with her mind all full of what had chanced,
Shrieked to the stranger ‘Slay not a dead man!’
‘The voice of Enid,’ said the knight; but she,
Beholding it was Edyrn son of Nudd,
Was moved so much the more, and shrieked again,
‘O cousin, slay not him who gave you life.’
And Edyrn moving frankly forward spake:
‘My lord Geraint, I greet you with all love;
I took you for a bandit knight of Doorm;
And fear not, Enid, I should fall upon him,
Who love you, Prince, with something of the love
Wherewith we love the Heaven that chastens us.
For once, when I was up so high in pride
That I was halfway down the slope to Hell,
By overthrowing me you threw me higher.

Now, made a knight of Arthur's Table Round,
 And since I knew this Earl, when I myself
 Was half a bandit in my lawless hour,
 I come the mouthpiece of our King to Doorm
 (The King is close behind me) bidding him
 Disband himself, and scatter all his powers,
 Submit, and hear the judgment of the King.'
 'He hears the judgment of the King of kings,'
 Cried the wan Prince; 'and lo, the powers of Doorm
 Are scattered,' and he pointed to the field,
 Where, huddled here and there on mound and knoll,
 Were men and women staring and aghast,
 While some yet fled; and then he plainlier told
 How the huge Earl lay slain within his hall.
 But when the knight besought him, 'Follow me,
 Prince, to the camp, and in the King's own ear
 Speak what has chanced; ye surely have endured
 Strange chances here alone;' that other flushed,
 And hung his head, and halted in reply,
 Fearing the mild face of the blameless King,
 And after madness acted question asked:
 Till Edyrn crying, 'If ye will not go
 To Arthur, then will Arthur come to you,'
 'Enough,' he said, 'I follow,' and they went.
 But Enid in their going had two fears,
 One from the bandit scattered in the field,
 And one from Edyrn. Every now and then,
 When Edyrn reined his charger at her side,
 She shrank a little. In a hollow land,
 From which old fires have broken, men may fear
 Fresh fire and ruin. He, perceiving, said:
 'Fair and dear cousin, you that most had cause
 To fear me, fear no longer, I am changed.
 Yourself were first the blameless cause to make
 My nature's prideful sparkle in the blood
 Break into furious flame; being repulsed
 By Yniol and yourself, I schemed and wrought
 Until I overturned him; then set up
 (With one main purpose ever at my heart)
 My haughty jousts, and took a paramour;
 Did her mock-honour as the fairest fair,
 And, toppling over all antagonism,
 So waxed in pride, that I believed myself
 Unconquerable, for I was wellnigh mad:
 And, but for my main purpose in these jousts,
 I should have slain your father, seized yourself.
 I lived in hope that sometime you would come
 To these my lists with him whom best you loved;
 And there, poor cousin, with your meek blue eyes
 The truest eyes that ever answered Heaven,
 Behold me overturn and trample on him.
 Then, had you cried, or knelt, or prayed to me,
 I should not less have killed him. And so you came,—
 But once you came,—and with your own true eyes

Beheld the man you loved (I speak as one
Speaks of a service done him) overthrow
My proud self, and my purpose three years old,
And set his foot upon me, and give me life.
There was I broken down; there was I saved:
Though thence I rode all-shamed, hating the life
He gave me, meaning to be rid of it.
And all the penance the Queen laid upon me
Was but to rest awhile within her court;
Where first as sullen as a beast new-caged,
And waiting to be treated like a wolf,
Because I knew my deeds were known, I found,
Instead of scornful pity or pure scorn,
Such fine reserve and noble reticence,
Manners so kind, yet stately, such a grace
Of tenderest courtesy, that I began
To glance behind me at my former life,
And find that it had been the wolf's indeed:
And oft I talked with Dubric, the high saint,
Who, with mild heat of holy oratory,
Subdued me somewhat to that gentleness,
Which, when it weds with manhood, makes a man.
And you were often there about the Queen,
But saw me not, or marked not if you saw;
Nor did I care or dare to speak with you,
But kept myself aloof till I was changed;
And fear not, cousin; I am changed indeed.'

He spoke, and Enid easily believed,
Like simple noble natures, credulous
Of what they long for, good in friend or foe,
There most in those who most have done them ill.
And when they reached the camp the King himself
Advanced to greet them, and beholding her
Though pale, yet happy, asked her not a word,
But went apart with Edyrn, whom he held
In converse for a little, and returned,
And, gravely smiling, lifted her from horse,
And kissed her with all pureness, brother-like,
And showed an empty tent allotted her,
And glancing for a minute, till he saw her
Pass into it, turned to the Prince, and said:

'Prince, when of late ye prayed me for my leave
To move to your own land, and there defend
Your marches, I was pricked with some reproof,
As one that let foul wrong stagnate and be,
By having looked too much through alien eyes,
And wrought too long with delegated hands,
Not used mine own: but now behold me come
To cleanse this common sewer of all my realm,
With Edyrn and with others: have ye looked
At Edyrn? have ye seen how nobly changed?
This work of his is great and wonderful.
His very face with change of heart is changed.
The world will not believe a man repents:

And this wise world of ours is mainly right.
 Full seldom doth a man repent, or use
 Both grace and will to pick the vicious quitch
 Of blood and custom wholly out of him,
 And make all clean, and plant himself afresh.
 Edyrn has done it, weeding all his heart
 As I will weed this land before I go.
 I, therefore, made him of our Table Round,
 Not rashly, but have proved him everyway
 One of our noblest, our most valorous,
 Sanest and most obedient: and indeed
 This work of Edyrn wrought upon himself
 After a life of violence, seems to me
 A thousand-fold more great and wonderful
 Than if some knight of mine, risking his life,
 My subject with my subjects under him,
 Should make an onslaught single on a realm
 Of robbers, though he slew them one by one,
 And were himself nigh wounded to the death.'

So spake the King; low bowed the Prince, and felt
 His work was neither great nor wonderful,
 And past to Enid's tent; and thither came
 The King's own leech to look into his hurt;
 And Enid tended on him there; and there
 Her constant motion round him, and the breath
 Of her sweet tendance hovering over him,
 Filled all the genial courses of his blood
 With deeper and with ever deeper love,
 As the south-west that blowing Bala lake
 Fills all the sacred Dee. So past the days.

But while Geraint lay healing of his hurt,
 The blameless King went forth and cast his eyes
 On each of all whom Uther left in charge
 Long since, to guard the justice of the King:
 He looked and found them wanting; and as now
 Men weed the white horse on the Berkshire hills
 To keep him bright and clean as heretofore,
 He rooted out the slothful officer
 Or guilty, which for bribe had winked at wrong,
 And in their chairs set up a stronger race
 With hearts and hands, and sent a thousand men
 To till the wastes, and moving everywhere
 Cleared the dark places and let in the law,
 And broke the bandit holds and cleansed the land.

Then, when Geraint was whole again, they past
 With Arthur to Caerleon upon Usk.
 There the great Queen once more embraced her friend,
 And clothed her in apparel like the day.
 And though Geraint could never take again
 That comfort from their converse which he took
 Before the Queen's fair name was breathed upon,
 He rested well content that all was well.
 Thence after tarrying for a space they rode,
 And fifty knights rode with them to the shores

Of Severn, and they past to their own land.
And there he kept the justice of the King
So vigorously yet mildly, that all hearts
Applauded, and the spiteful whisper died:
And being ever foremost in the chase,
And victor at the tilt and tournament,
They called him the great Prince and man of men.
But Enid, whom her ladies loved to call
Enid the Fair, a grateful people named
Enid the Good; and in their halls arose
The cry of children, Enids and Geraints
Of times to be; nor did he doubt her more,
But rested in her fealty, till he crowned
A happy life with a fair death, and fell
Against the heathen of the Northern Sea
In battle, fighting for the blameless King.

Balin and Balan

Pellam the King, who held and lost with Lot
In that first war, and had his realm restored
But rendered tributary, failed of late
To send his tribute; wherefore Arthur called
His treasurer, one of many years, and spake,
'Go thou with him and him and bring it to us,
Lest we should set one truer on his throne.
Man's word is God in man.'
His Baron said
'We go but harken: there be two strange knights
Who sit near Camelot at a fountain-side,
A mile beneath the forest, challenging
And overthrowing every knight who comes.
Wilt thou I undertake them as we pass,
And send them to thee?'
Arthur laughed upon him.
'Old friend, too old to be so young, depart,
Delay not thou for aught, but let them sit,
Until they find a lustier than themselves.'
So these departed. Early, one fair dawn,
The light-winged spirit of his youth returned
On Arthur's heart; he armed himself and went,
So coming to the fountain-side beheld
Balin and Balan sitting statuelike,
Brethren, to right and left the spring, that down,
From underneath a plume of lady-fern,
Sang, and the sand danced at the bottom of it.
And on the right of Balin Balin's horse
Was fast beside an alder, on the left
Of Balan Balan's near a poplartree.
'Fair Sirs,' said Arthur, 'wherefore sit ye here?'
Balin and Balan answered 'For the sake
Of glory; we be mightier men than all
In Arthur's court; that also have we proved;
For whatsoever knight against us came
Or I or he have easily overthrown.'

'I too,' said Arthur, 'am of Arthur's hall,
 But rather proven in his Paynim wars
 Than famous jousts; but see, or proven or not,
 Whether me likewise ye can overthrow.'
 And Arthur lightly smote the brethren down,
 And lightly so returned, and no man knew.

Then Balin rose, and Balan, and beside
 The carolling water set themselves again,
 And spake no word until the shadow turned;
 When from the fringe of coppice round them burst
 A spangled pursuivant, and crying 'Sirs,
 Rise, follow! ye be sent for by the King.'
 They followed; whom when Arthur seeing asked
 'Tell me your names; why sat ye by the well?'
 Balin the stillness of a minute broke
 Saying 'An unmelodious name to thee,
 Balin, "the Savage"—that addition thine—
 My brother and my better, this man here,
 Balan. I smote upon the naked skull
 A thrall of thine in open hall, my hand
 Was gauntleted, half slew him; for I heard
 He had spoken evil of me; thy just wrath
 Sent me a three-years' exile from thine eyes.
 I have not lived my life delightsomely:
 For I that did that violence to thy thrall,
 Had often wrought some fury on myself,
 Saving for Balan: those three kingless years
 Have past—were wormwood-bitter to me. King,
 Methought that if we sat beside the well,
 And hurled to ground what knight soever spurred
 Against us, thou would'st take me gladlier back,
 And make, as ten-times worthier to be thine
 Than twenty Balins, Balan knight. I have said.
 Not so—not all. A man of thine today
 Abashed us both, and brake my boast. Thy will?'
 Said Arthur 'Thou hast ever spoken truth;
 Thy too fierce manhood would not let thee lie.
 Rise, my true knight. As children learn, be thou
 Wiser for falling! walk with me, and move
 To music with thine Order and the King.
 Thy chair, a grief to all the brethren, stands
 Vacant, but thou retake it, mine again!'

Thereafter, when Sir Balin entered hall,
 The Lost one Found was greeted as in Heaven
 With joy that blazed itself in woodland wealth
 Of leaf, and gayest garlandage of flowers,
 Along the walls and down the board; they sat,
 And cup clashed cup; they drank and some one sang,
 Sweet-voiced, a song of welcome, whereupon
 Their common shout in chorus, mounting, made
 Those banners of twelve battles overhead
 Stir, as they stirred of old, when Arthur's host
 Proclaimed him Victor, and the day was won.
 Then Balan added to their Order lived

A wealthier life than heretofore with these
And Balin, till their embassy returned.
'Sir King' they brought report 'we hardly found,
So bushed about it is with gloom, the hall
Of him to whom ye sent us, Pellam, once
A Christless foe of thine as ever dashed
Horse against horse; but seeing that thy realm
Hath prospered in the name of Christ, the King
Took, as in rival heat, to holy things;
And finds himself descended from the Saint
Arimathæan Joseph; him who first
Brought the great faith to Britain over seas;
He boasts his life as purer than thine own;
Eats scarce enow to keep his pulse abeat;
Hath pushed aside his faithful wife, nor lets
Or dame or damsel enter at his gates
Lest he should be polluted. This gray King
Showed us a shrine wherein were wonders—yea—
Rich arks with priceless bones of martyrdom,
Thorns of the crown and shivers of the cross,
And therewithal (for thus he told us) brought
By holy Joseph thither, that same spear
Wherewith the Roman pierced the side of Christ.
He much amazed us; after, when we sought
The tribute, answered "I have quite foregone
All matters of this world: Garlon, mine heir,
Of him demand it," which this Garlon gave
With much ado, railing at thine and thee.
'But when we left, in those deep woods we found
A knight of thine spear-stricken from behind,
Dead, whom we buried; more than one of us
Cried out on Garlon, but a woodman there
Reported of some demon in the woods
Was once a man, who driven by evil tongues
From all his fellows, lived alone, and came
To learn black magic, and to hate his kind
With such a hate, that when he died, his soul
Became a Fiend, which, as the man in life
Was wounded by blind tongues he saw not whence,
Strikes from behind. This woodman showed the cave
From which he sallies, and wherein he dwelt.
We saw the hoof-print of a horse, no more.'
Then Arthur, 'Let who goes before me, see
He do not fall behind me: foully slain
And villainously! who will hunt for me
This demon of the woods?' Said Balan, 'I!
So claimed the quest and rode away, but first,
Embracing Balin, 'Good my brother, hear!
Let not thy moods prevail, when I am gone
Who used to lay them! hold them outer fiends,
Who leap at thee to tear thee; shake them aside,
Dreams ruling when wit sleeps! yea, but to dream
That any of these would wrong thee, wrongs thyself.
Witness their flowery welcome. Bound are they

To speak no evil. Truly save for fears,
 My fears for thee, so rich a fellowship
 Would make me wholly blest: thou one of them,
 Be one indeed: consider them, and all
 Their bearing in their common bond of love,
 No more of hatred than in Heaven itself,
 No more of jealousy than in Paradise.'

So Balan warned, and went; Balin remained:
 Who—for but three brief moons had glanced away
 From being knighted till he smote the thrall,
 And faded from the presence into years
 Of exile—now would strictlier set himself
 To learn what Arthur meant by courtesy,
 Manhood, and knighthood; wherefore hovered round
 Lancelot, but when he marked his high sweet smile
 In passing, and a transitory word
 Make knight or churl or child or damsel seem
 From being smiled at happier in themselves—
 Sighed, as a boy lame-born beneath a height,
 That glooms his valley, sighs to see the peak
 Sun-flushed, or touch at night the northern star;
 For one from out his village lately climed
 And brought report of azure lands and fair,
 Far seen to left and right; and he himself
 Hath hardly scaled with help a hundred feet
 Up from the base: so Balin marvelling oft
 How far beyond him Lancelot seemed to move,
 Groaned, and at times would mutter, 'These be gifts,
 Born with the blood, not learnable, divine,
 Beyond my reach. Well had I foughten—well—
 In those fierce wars, struck hard—and had I crowned
 With my slain self the heaps of whom I slew—
 So—better!—But this worship of the Queen,
 That honour too wherein she holds him—this,
 This was the sunshine that hath given the man
 A growth, a name that branches o'er the rest,
 And strength against all odds, and what the King
 So prizes—overprizes—gentleness.
 Her likewise would I worship an I might.
 I never can be close with her, as he
 That brought her hither. Shall I pray the King
 To let me bear some token of his Queen
 Whereon to gaze, remembering her—forget
 My heats and violences? live afresh?
 What, if the Queen disdained to grant it! nay
 Being so stately-gentle, would she make
 My darkness blackness? and with how sweet grace
 She greeted my return! Bold will I be—
 Some goodly cognizance of Guinevere,
 In lieu of this rough beast upon my shield,
 Langued gules, and toothed with grinning savagery.'

And Arthur, when Sir Balin sought him, said
 'What wilt thou bear?' Balin was bold, and asked
 To bear her own crown-royal upon shield,

Whereat she smiled and turned her to the King,
Who answered 'Thou shalt put the crown to use.
The crown is but the shadow of the King,
And this a shadow's shadow, let him have it,
So this will help him of his violences!'
'No shadow' said Sir Balin 'O my Queen,
But light to me! no shadow, O my King,
But golden earnest of a gentler life!'
So Balin bare the crown, and all the knights
Approved him, and the Queen, and all the world
Made music, and he felt his being move
In music with his Order, and the King.
The nightingale, full-toned in middle May,
Hath ever and anon a note so thin
It seems another voice in other groves;
Thus, after some quick burst of sudden wrath,
The music in him seemed to change, and grow
Faint and far-off.
And once he saw the thrall
His passion half had gauntleted to death,
That causer of his banishment and shame,
Smile at him, as he deemed, presumptuously:
His arm half rose to strike again, but fell:
The memory of that cognizance on shield
Weighted it down, but in himself he moaned:
'Too high this mount of Camelot for me:
These high-set courtesies are not for me.
Shall I not rather prove the worse for these?
Fierier and stormier from restraining, break
Into some madness even before the Queen?'
Thus, as a hearth lit in a mountain home,
And glancing on the window, when the gloom
Of twilight deepens round it, seems a flame
That rages in the woodland far below,
So when his moods were darkened, court and King
And all the kindly warmth of Arthur's hall
Shadowed an angry distance: yet he strove
To learn the graces of their Table, fought
Hard with himself, and seemed at length in peace.
Then chanced, one morning, that Sir Balin sat
Close-bowered in that garden nigh the hall.
A walk of roses ran from door to door;
A walk of lilies crost it to the bower:
And down that range of roses the great Queen
Came with slow steps, the morning on her face;
And all in shadow from the counter door
Sir Lancelot as to meet her, then at once,
As if he saw not, glanced aside, and paced
The long white walk of lilies toward the bower.
Followed the Queen; Sir Balin heard her 'Prince,
Art thou so little loyal to thy Queen,
As pass without good morrow to thy Queen?'
To whom Sir Lancelot with his eyes on earth,
'Fain would I still be loyal to the Queen.'

'Yea so' she said 'but so to pass me by—
 So loyal scarce is loyal to thyself,
 Whom all men rate the king of courtesy.
 Let be: ye stand, fair lord, as in a dream.'

Then Lancelot with his hand among the flowers
 'Yea—for a dream. Last night methought I saw
 That maiden Saint who stands with lily in hand
 In yonder shrine. All round her prest the dark,
 And all the light upon her silver face
 Flowed from the spiritual lily that she held.
 Lo! these her emblems drew mine eyes—away:
 For see, how perfect-pure! As light a flush
 As hardly tints the blossom of the quince
 Would mar their charm of stainless maidenhood.'

'Sweeter to me' she said 'this garden rose
 Deep-hued and many-folded! sweeter still
 The wild-wood hyacinth and the bloom of May.
 Prince, we have ridden before among the flowers
 In those fair days—not all as cool as these,
 Though season-earlier. Art thou sad? or sick?
 Our noble King will send thee his own leech—
 Sick? or for any matter angered at me?'

Then Lancelot lifted his large eyes; they dwelt
 Deep-tranced on hers, and could not fall: her hue
 Changed at his gaze: so turning side by side
 They past, and Balin started from his bower.

'Queen? subject? but I see not what I see.
 Damsel and lover? hear not what I hear.
 My father hath begotten me in his wrath.
 I suffer from the things before me, know,
 Learn nothing; am not worthy to be knight;
 A churl, a clown!' and in him gloom on gloom
 Deepened: he sharply caught his lance and shield,
 Nor stayed to crave permission of the King,
 But, mad for strange adventure, dashed away.

He took the selfsame track as Balan, saw
 The fountain where they sat together, sighed
 'Was I not better there with him?' and rode
 The skyless woods, but under open blue
 Came on the hoarhead woodman at a bough
 Wearily hewing. 'Churl, thine axe!' he cried,
 Descended, and disjoined it at a blow:
 To whom the woodman uttered wonderingly
 'Lord, thou couldst lay the Devil of these woods
 If arm of flesh could lay him.' Balin cried
 'Him, or the viler devil who plays his part,
 To lay that devil would lay the Devil in me.'
 'Nay' said the churl, 'our devil is a truth,
 I saw the flash of him but yestereven.
 And some do say that our Sir Garlon too
 Hath learned black magic, and to ride unseen.
 Look to the cave.' But Balin answered him
 'Old fabler, these be fancies of the churl,
 Look to thy woodcraft,' and so leaving him,

Now with slack rein and careless of himself,
Now with dug spur and raving at himself,
Now with droopt brow down the long glades he rode;
So marked not on his right a cavern-chasm
Yawn over darkness, where, nor far within,
The whole day died, but, dying, gleamed on rocks
Roof-pendent, sharp; and others from the floor,
Tusklike, arising, made that mouth of night
Whereout the Demon issued up from Hell.
He marked not this, but blind and deaf to all
Save that chained rage, which ever yelpt within,
Past eastward from the falling sun. At once
He felt the hollow-beaten mosses thud
And tremble, and then the shadow of a spear,
Shot from behind him, ran along the ground.
Sideways he started from the path, and saw,
With pointed lance as if to pierce, a shape,
A light of armour by him flash, and pass
And vanish in the woods; and followed this,
But all so blind in rage that unawares
He burst his lance against a forest bough,
Dishorsed himself, and rose again, and fled
Far, till the castle of a King, the hall
Of Pellam, lichen-bearded, grayly draped
With streaming grass, appeared, low-built but strong;
The ruinous donjon as a knoll of moss,
The battlement overtopped with ivytods,
A home of bats, in every tower an owl.
Then spake the men of Pellam crying 'Lord,
Why wear ye this crown-royal upon shield?'
Said Balin 'For the fairest and the best
Of ladies living gave me this to bear.'
So stalled his horse, and strode across the court,
But found the greetings both of knight and King
Faint in the low dark hall of banquet: leaves
Laid their green faces flat against the panes,
Sprays grated, and the cankered boughs without
Whined in the wood; for all was hushed within,
Till when at feast Sir Garlon likewise asked
'Why wear ye that crown-royal?' Balin said
'The Queen we worship, Lancelot, I, and all,
As fairest, best and purest, granted me
To bear it!' Such a sound (for Arthur's knights
Were hated strangers in the hall) as makes
The white swan-mother, sitting, when she hears
A strange knee rustle through her secret reeds,
Made Garlon, hissing; then he sourly smiled.
'Fairest I grant her: I have seen; but best,
Best, purest? thou from Arthur's hall, and yet
So simple! hast thou eyes, or if, are these
So far besotted that they fail to see
This fair wife-worship cloaks a secret shame?
Truly, ye men of Arthur be but babes.'
A goblet on the board by Balin, bossed

With holy Joseph's legend, on his right
Stood, all of massiest bronze: one side had sea
And ship and sail and angels blowing on it:
And one was rough with wattling, and the walls
Of that low church he built at Glastonbury.
This Balin graspt, but while in act to hurl,
Through memory of that token on the shield
Relaxed his hold: 'I will be gentle' he thought
'And passing gentle' caught his hand away,
Then fiercely to Sir Garlon 'Eyes have I
That saw today the shadow of a spear,
Shot from behind me, run along the ground;
Eyes too that long have watched how Lancelot draws
From homage to the best and purest, might,
Name, manhood, and a grace, but scanty thine,
Who, sitting in thine own hall, canst endure
To mouth so huge a foulness—to thy guest,
Me, me of Arthur's Table. Felon talk!
Let be! no more!'
But not the less by night
The scorn of Garlon, poisoning all his rest,
Stung him in dreams. At length, and dim through leaves
Blinkt the white morn, sprays grated, and old boughs
Whined in the wood. He rose, descended, met
The scorner in the castle court, and fain,
For hate and loathing, would have past him by;
But when Sir Garlon uttered mocking-wise;
'What, wear ye still that same crown-scandalous?'
His countenance blackened, and his forehead veins
Bloated, and branched; and tearing out of sheath
The brand, Sir Balin with a fiery 'Ha!
So thou be shadow, here I make thee ghost,'
Hard upon helm smote him, and the blade flew
Splintering in six, and clinkt upon the stones.
Then Garlon, reeling slowly backward, fell,
And Balin by the banneret of his helm
Dragged him, and struck, but from the castle a cry
Sounded across the court, and—men-at-arms,
A score with pointed lances, making at him—
He dashed the pummel at the foremost face,
Beneath a low door dipt, and made his feet
Wings through a glimmering gallery, till he marked
The portal of King Pellam's chapel wide
And inward to the wall; he slept behind;
Thence in a moment heard them pass like wolves
Howling; but while he stared about the shrine,
In which he scarce could spy the Christ for Saints,
Beheld before a golden altar lie
The longest lance his eyes had ever seen,
Point-painted red; and seizing thereupon
Pushed through an open casement down, leaned on it,
Leapt in a semicircle, and lit on earth;
Then hand at ear, and harkening from what side
The blindfold rummage buried in the walls
Might echo, ran the counter path, and found

His charger, mounted on him and away.
An arrow whizzed to the right, one to the left,
One overhead; and Pellam's feeble cry
'Stay, stay him! he defileth heavenly things
With earthly uses'—made him quickly dive
Beneath the boughs, and race through many a mile
Of dense and open, till his goodly horse,
Arising wearily at a fallen oak,
Stumbled headlong, and cast him face to ground.

Half-wroth he had not ended, but all glad,
Knightlike, to find his charger yet unlamed,
Sir Balin drew the shield from off his neck,
Stared at the priceless cognizance, and thought
'I have shamed thee so that now thou shamest me,
Thee will I bear no more,' high on a branch
Hung it, and turned aside into the woods,
And there in gloom cast himself all along,
Moaning 'My violences, my violences!'

But now the wholesome music of the wood
Was dumb'd by one from out the hall of Mark,
A damsel-errant, warbling, as she rode
The woodland alleys, Vivien, with her Squire.

'The fire of Heaven has killed the barren cold,
And kindled all the plain and all the wold.
The new leaf ever pushes off the old.
The fire of Heaven is not the flame of Hell.

'Old priest, who mumble worship in your quire—
Old monk and nun, ye scorn the world's desire,
Yet in your frosty cells ye feel the fire!
The fire of Heaven is not the flame of Hell.

'The fire of Heaven is on the dusty ways.
The wayside blossoms open to the blaze.
The whole wood-world is one full peal of praise.
The fire of Heaven is not the flame of Hell.

'The fire of Heaven is lord of all things good,
And starve not thou this fire within thy blood,
But follow Vivien through the fiery flood!
The fire of Heaven is not the flame of Hell!'

Then turning to her Squire 'This fire of Heaven,
This old sun-worship, boy, will rise again,
And beat the cross to earth, and break the King
And all his Table.'

Then they reached a glade,
Where under one long lane of cloudless air
Before another wood, the royal crown
Sparkled, and swaying upon a restless elm
Drew the vague glance of Vivien, and her Squire;
Amazed were these; 'Lo there' she cried—'a crown—
Borne by some high lord-prince of Arthur's hall,
And there a horse! the rider? where is he?
See, yonder lies one dead within the wood.
Not dead; he stirs!—but sleeping. I will speak.
Hail, royal knight, we break on thy sweet rest,

Not, doubtless, all unearned by noble deeds.
 But bounden art thou, if from Arthur's hall,
 To help the weak. Behold, I fly from shame,
 A lustful King, who sought to win my love
 Through evil ways: the knight, with whom I rode,
 Hath suffered misadventure, and my squire
 Hath in him small defence; but thou, Sir Prince,
 Wilt surely guide me to the warrior King,
 Arthur the blameless, pure as any maid,
 To get me shelter for my maidenhood.
 I charge thee by that crown upon thy shield,
 And by the great Queen's name, arise and hence.'

And Balin rose, 'Thither no more! nor Prince
 Nor knight am I, but one that hath defamed
 The cognizance she gave me: here I dwell
 Savage among the savage woods, here die—
 Die: let the wolves' black maws ensepulchre
 Their brother beast, whose anger was his lord.
 O me, that such a name as Guinevere's,
 Which our high Lancelot hath so lifted up,
 And been thereby uplifted, should through me,
 My violence, and my villainy, come to shame.'

Thereat she suddenly laughed and shrill, anon
 Sighed all as suddenly. Said Balin to her
 'Is this thy courtesy—to mock me, ha?
 Hence, for I will not with thee.' Again she sighed
 'Pardon, sweet lord! we maidens often laugh
 When sick at heart, when rather we should weep.
 I knew thee wronged. I brake upon thy rest,
 And now full loth am I to break thy dream,
 But thou art man, and canst abide a truth,
 Though bitter. Hither, boy—and mark me well.
 Dost thou remember at Caerleon once—
 A year ago—nay, then I love thee not—
 Ay, thou rememberest well—one summer dawn—
 By the great tower—Caerleon upon Usk—
 Nay, truly we were hidden: this fair lord,
 The flower of all their vestal knighthood, knelt
 In amorous homage—knelt—what else?—O ay
 Knelt, and drew down from out his night-black hair
 And mumbled that white hand whose ringed caress
 Had wandered from her own King's golden head,
 And lost itself in darkness, till she cried—
 I thought the great tower would crash down on both—
 "Rise, my sweet King, and kiss me on the lips,
 Thou art my King." This lad, whose lightest word
 Is mere white truth in simple nakedness,
 Saw them embrace: he reddens, cannot speak,
 So bashful, he! but all the maiden Saints,
 The deathless mother-maidenhood of Heaven,
 Cry out upon her. Up then, ride with me!
 Talk not of shame! thou canst not, an thou would'st,
 Do these more shame than these have done themselves.'
 She lied with ease; but horror-stricken he,

Remembering that dark bower at Camelot,
Breathed in a dismal whisper 'It is truth.'
Sunnily she smiled 'And even in this lone wood,
Sweet lord, ye do right well to whisper this.
Fools prate, and perish traitors. Woods have tongues,
As walls have ears: but thou shalt go with me,
And we will speak at first exceeding low.
Meet is it the good King be not deceived.
See now, I set thee high on vantage ground,
From whence to watch the time, and eagle-like
Stoop at thy will on Lancelot and the Queen.'

She ceased; his evil spirit upon him leapt,
He ground his teeth together, sprang with a yell,
Tore from the branch, and cast on earth, the shield,
Drove his mailed heel athwart the royal crown,
Stamp'd all into defacement, hurled it from him
Among the forest weeds, and cursed the tale,
The told-of, and the teller.
That weird yell,
Unearthlier than all shriek of bird or beast,
Thrilled through the woods; and Balin lurking there
(His quest was unaccomplished) heard and thought
'The scream of that Wood-devil I came to quell!'
Then nearing 'Lo! he hath slain some brother-knight,
And tramples on the goodly shield to show
His loathing of our Order and the Queen.
My quest, meseems, is here. Or devil or man
Guard thou thine head.' Sir Balin spake not word,
But snatched a sudden buckler from the Squire,
And vaulted on his horse, and so they crashed
In onset, and King Pellam's holy spear,
Reputed to be red with sinless blood,
Redded at once with sinful, for the point
Across the maiden shield of Balin pricked
The hauberk to the flesh; and Balin's horse
Was wearied to the death, and, when they clashed,
Rolling back upon Balin, crushed the man
Inward, and either fell, and swooned away.

Then to her Squire muttered the damsel 'Fools!
This fellow hath wrought some foulness with his Queen:
Else never had he borne her crown, nor raved
And thus foamed over at a rival name:
But thou, Sir Chick, that scarce hast broken shell,
Art yet half-yolk, not even come to down—
Who never sawest Caerleon upon Usk—
And yet hast often pleaded for my love—
See what I see, be thou where I have been,
Or else Sir Chick—dismount and loose their casques
I fain would know what manner of men they be.'
And when the Squire had loosed them, 'Goodly!—look!
They might have cropt the myriad flower of May,
And butt each other here, like brainless bulls,
Dead for one heifer!
Then the gentle Squire

'I hold them happy, so they died for love:
 And, Vivien, though ye beat me like your dog,
 I too could die, as now I live, for thee.'
 'Live on, Sir Boy,' she cried. 'I better prize
 The living dog than the dead lion: away!
 I cannot brook to gaze upon the dead.'
 Then leapt her palfrey o'er the fallen oak,
 And bounding forward 'Leave them to the wolves.'

But when their foreheads felt the cooling air,
 Balin first woke, and seeing that true face,
 Familiar up from cradle-time, so wan,
 Crawled slowly with low moans to where he lay,
 And on his dying brother cast himself
 Dying; and he lifted faint eyes; he felt
 One near him; all at once they found the world,
 Staring wild-wide; then with a childlike wail
 And drawing down the dim disastrous brow
 That o'er him hung, he kissed it, moaned and spake;

'O Balin, Balin, I that fain had died
 To save thy life, have brought thee to thy death.
 Why had ye not the shield I knew? and why
 Trampled ye thus on that which bare the Crown?'

Then Balin told him brokenly, and in gasps,
 All that had chanced, and Balan moaned again.

'Brother, I dwelt a day in Pellam's hall:
 This Garlon mocked me, but I heeded not.
 And one said "Eat in peace! a liar is he,
 And hates thee for the tribute!" this good knight
 Told me, that twice a wanton damsel came,
 And sought for Garlon at the castle-gates,
 Whom Pellam drove away with holy heat.
 I well believe this damsel, and the one
 Who stood beside thee even now, the same.
 "She dwells among the woods" he said "and meets
 And dallies with him in the Mouth of Hell."
 Foul are their lives; foul are their lips; they lied.
 Pure as our own true Mother is our Queen."

'O brother' answered Balin 'woe is me!
 My madness all thy life has been thy doom,
 Thy curse, and darkened all thy day; and now
 The night has come. I scarce can see thee now.

Goodnight! for we shall never bid again
 Goodmorrow—Dark my doom was here, and dark
 It will be there. I see thee now no more.
 I would not mine again should darken thine,
 Goodnight, true brother.

Balan answered low

'Goodnight, true brother here! goodmorrow there!
 We two were born together, and we die
 Together by one doom:' and while he spoke
 Closed his death-drowsing eyes, and slept the sleep
 With Balin, either locked in either's arm.

Merlin and Vivien

A storm was coming, but the winds were still,
And in the wild woods of Broceliande,
Before an oak, so hollow, huge and old
It looked a tower of ivied masonwork,
At Merlin's feet the wily Vivien lay.

For he that always bare in bitter grudge
The slights of Arthur and his Table, Mark
The Cornish King, had heard a wandering voice,
A minstrel of Caerlon by strong storm
Blown into shelter at Tintagil, say
That out of naked knightlike purity
Sir Lancelot worshipt no unmarried girl
But the great Queen herself, fought in her name,
Swore by her—vows like theirs, that high in heaven
Love most, but neither marry, nor are given
In marriage, angels of our Lord's report.

He ceased, and then—for Vivien sweetly said
(She sat beside the banquet nearest Mark),
'And is the fair example followed, Sir,
In Arthur's household?'—answered innocently:
'Ay, by some few—ay, truly—youths that hold
It more beseems the perfect virgin knight
To worship woman as true wife beyond
All hopes of gaining, than as maiden girl.
They place their pride in Lancelot and the Queen.
So passionate for an utter purity
Beyond the limit of their bond, are these,
For Arthur bound them not to singleness.
Brave hearts and clean! and yet—God guide them—young.'

Then Mark was half in heart to hurl his cup
Straight at the speaker, but forbore: he rose
To leave the hall, and, Vivien following him,
Turned to her: 'Here are snakes within the grass;
And you methinks, O Vivien, save ye fear
The monkish manhood, and the mask of pure
Worn by this court, can stir them till they sting.'

And Vivien answered, smiling scornfully,
'Why fear? because that fostered at thy court
I savour of thy—virtues? fear them? no.
As Love, if Love is perfect, casts out fear,
So Hate, if Hate is perfect, casts out fear.
My father died in battle against the King,
My mother on his corpse in open field;
She bore me there, for born from death was I
Among the dead and sown upon the wind—
And then on thee! and shown the truth betimes,
That old true filth, and bottom of the well
Where Truth is hidden. Gracious lessons thine
And maxims of the mud! "This Arthur pure!
Great Nature through the flesh herself hath made
Gives him the lie! There is no being pure,
My cherub; saith not Holy Writ the same?"—

If I were Arthur, I would have thy blood.
 Thy blessing, stainless King! I bring thee back,
 When I have ferreted out their burrowings,
 The hearts of all this Order in mine hand—
 Ay—so that fate and craft and folly close,
 Perchance, one curl of Arthur's golden beard.
 To me this narrow grizzled fork of thine
 Is cleaner-fashioned—Well, I loved thee first,
 That warps the wit.'

Loud laughed the graceless Mark,
 But Vivien, into Camelot stealing, lodged
 Low in the city, and on a festal day
 When Guinevere was crossing the great hall
 Cast herself down, knelt to the Queen, and wailed.
 'Why kneel ye there? What evil hath ye wrought?
 Rise!' and the damsel bidden rise arose
 And stood with folded hands and downward eyes
 Of glancing corner, and all meekly said,
 'None wrought, but suffered much, an orphan maid!
 My father died in battle for thy King,
 My mother on his corpse—in open field,
 The sad sea-sounding wastes of Lyonesse—
 Poor wretch—no friend!—and now by Mark the King
 For that small charm of feature mine, pursued—
 If any such be mine—I fly to thee.
 Save, save me thou—Woman of women—thine
 The wreath of beauty, thine the crown of power,
 Be thine the balm of pity, O Heaven's own white
 Earth-angel, stainless bride of stainless King—
 Help, for he follows! take me to thyself!
 O yield me shelter for mine innocence
 Among thy maidens!

Here her slow sweet eyes
 Fear-tremulous, but humbly hopeful, rose
 Fixt on her hearer's, while the Queen who stood
 All glittering like May sunshine on May leaves
 In green and gold, and plumed with green replied,
 'Peace, child! of overpraise and overblame
 We choose the last. Our noble Arthur, him
 Ye scarce can overpraise, will hear and know.
 Nay—we believe all evil of thy Mark—
 Well, we shall test thee farther; but this hour
 We ride a-hawking with Sir Lancelot.
 He hath given us a fair falcon which he trained;
 We go to prove it. Bide ye here the while.'

She past; and Vivien murmured after 'Go!
 I bide the while.' Then through the portal-arch
 Peering askance, and muttering broken-wise,
 As one that labours with an evil dream,
 Beheld the Queen and Lancelot get to horse.
 'Is that the Lancelot? goodly—ay, but gaunt:
 Courteous—amends for gauntness—takes her hand—
 That glance of theirs, but for the street, had been
 A clinging kiss—how hand lingers in hand!

Let go at last!—they ride away—to hawk
For waterfowl. Royaller game is mine.
For such a supersensual sensual bond
As that gray cricket chirpt of at our hearth—
Touch flax with flame—a glance will serve—the liars!
Ah little rat that borest in the dyke
Thy hole by night to let the boundless deep
Down upon far-off cities while they dance—
Or dream—of thee they dreamed not—nor of me
These—ay, but each of either: ride, and dream
The mortal dream that never yet was mine—
Ride, ride and dream until ye wake—to me!
Then, narrow court and lubber King, farewell!
For Lancelot will be gracious to the rat,
And our wise Queen, if knowing that I know,
Will hate, loathe, fear—but honour me the more.'

Yet while they rode together down the plain,
Their talk was all of training, terms of art,
Diet and seeling, jesses, leash and lure.
'She is too noble' he said 'to check at pies,
Nor will she rake: there is no baseness in her.'
Here when the Queen demanded as by chance
'Know ye the stranger woman?' 'Let her be,'
Said Lancelot and unhooded casting off
The goodly falcon free; she towered; her bells,
Tone under tone, shrilled; and they lifted up
Their eager faces, wondering at the strength,
Boldness and royal knighthood of the bird
Who pounced her quarry and slew it. Many a time
As once—of old—among the flowers—they rode.

But Vivien half-forgotten of the Queen
Among her damsels broidering sat, heard, watched
And whispered: through the peaceful court she crept
And whispered: then as Arthur in the highest
Leavened the world, so Vivien in the lowest,
Arriving at a time of golden rest,
And sowing one ill hint from ear to ear,
While all the heathen lay at Arthur's feet,
And no quest came, but all was joust and play,
Leavened his hall. They heard and let her be.

Thereafter as an enemy that has left
Death in the living waters, and withdrawn,
The wily Vivien stole from Arthur's court.

She hated all the knights, and heard in thought
Their lavish comment when her name was named.
For once, when Arthur walking all alone,
Vext at a rumour issued from herself
Of some corruption crept among his knights,
Had met her, Vivien, being greeted fair,
Would fain have wrought upon his cloudy mood
With reverent eyes mock-loyal, shaken voice,
And fluttered adoration, and at last
With dark sweet hints of some who prized him more
Than who should prize him most; at which the King

Had gazed upon her blankly and gone by:
But one had watched, and had not held his peace:
It made the laughter of an afternoon
That Vivien should attempt the blameless King.
And after that, she set herself to gain
Him, the most famous man of all those times,
Merlin, who knew the range of all their arts,
Had built the King his havens, ships, and halls,
Was also Bard, and knew the starry heavens;
The people called him Wizard; whom at first
She played about with slight and sprightly talk,
And vivid smiles, and faintly-venomed points
Of slander, glancing here and grazing there;
And yielding to his kindlier moods, the Seer
Would watch her at her petulance, and play,
Even when they seemed unloveable, and laugh
As those that watch a kitten; thus he grew
Tolerant of what he half disdained, and she,
Perceiving that she was but half disdained,
Began to break her sports with graver fits,
Turn red or pale, would often when they met
Sigh fully, or all-silent gaze upon him
With such a fixt devotion, that the old man,
Though doubtful, felt the flattery, and at times
Would flatter his own wish in age for love,
And half believe her true: for thus at times
He wavered; but that other clung to him,
Fixt in her will, and so the seasons went.

Then fell on Merlin a great melancholy;
He walked with dreams and darkness, and he found
A doom that ever poised itself to fall,
An ever-moaning battle in the mist,
World-war of dying flesh against the life,
Death in all life and lying in all love,
The meanest having power upon the highest,
And the high purpose broken by the worm.

So leaving Arthur's court he gained the beach;
There found a little boat, and stept into it;
And Vivien followed, but he marked her not.
She took the helm and he the sail; the boat
Drave with a sudden wind across the deeps,
And touching Breton sands, they disembarked.
And then she followed Merlin all the way,
Even to the wild woods of Broceliande.
For Merlin once had told her of a charm,
The which if any wrought on anyone
With woven paces and with waving arms,
The man so wrought on ever seemed to lie
Closed in the four walls of a hollow tower,
From which was no escape for evermore;
And none could find that man for evermore,
Nor could he see but him who wrought the charm
Coming and going, and he lay as dead
And lost to life and use and name and fame.

And Vivien ever sought to work the charm
Upon the great Enchanter of the Time,
As fancying that her glory would be great
According to his greatness whom she quenched.
There lay she all her length and kissed his feet,
As if in deepest reverence and in love.
A twist of gold was round her hair; a robe
Of samite without price, that more exprest
Than hid her, clung about her lissome limbs,
In colour like the satin-shining palm
On sallows in the windy gleams of March:
And while she kissed them, crying, 'Trample me,
Dear feet, that I have followed through the world,
And I will pay you worship; tread me down
And I will kiss you for it;' he was mute:
So dark a forethought rolled about his brain,
As on a dull day in an Ocean cave
The blind wave feeling round his long sea-hall
In silence: wherefore, when she lifted up
A face of sad appeal, and spake and said,
'O Merlin, do ye love me?' and again,
'O Merlin, do ye love me?' and once more,
'Great Master, do ye love me?' he was mute.
And lissome Vivien, holding by his heel,
Writhed toward him, slid up his knee and sat,
Behind his ankle twined her hollow feet
Together, curved an arm about his neck,
Clung like a snake; and letting her left hand
Droop from his mighty shoulder, as a leaf,
Made with her right a comb of pearl to part
The lists of such a board as youth gone out
Had left in ashes: then he spoke and said,
Not looking at her, 'Who are wise in love
Love most, say least,' and Vivien answered quick,
'I saw the little elf-god eyeless once
In Arthur's arras hall at Camelot:
But neither eyes nor tongue—O stupid child!
Yet you are wise who say it; let me think
Silence is wisdom: I am silent then,
And ask no kiss;' then adding all at once,
'And lo, I clothe myself with wisdom,' drew
The vast and shaggy mantle of his beard
Across her neck and bosom to her knee,
And called herself a gilded summer fly
Caught in a great old tyrant spider's web,
Who meant to eat her up in that wild wood
Without one word. So Vivien called herself,
But rather seemed a lovely baleful star
Veiled in gray vapour; till he sadly smiled:
'To what request for what strange boon,' he said,
'Are these your pretty tricks and fooleries,
O Vivien, the preamble? yet my thanks,
For these have broken up my melancholy.'
And Vivien answered smiling saucily,

'What, O my Master, have ye found your voice?
I bid the stranger welcome. Thanks at last!
But yesterday you never opened lip,
Except indeed to drink: no cup had we:
In mine own lady palms I culled the spring
That gathered trickling dropwise from the cleft,
And made a pretty cup of both my hands
And offered you it kneeling: then you drank
And knew no more, nor gave me one poor word;
O no more thanks than might a goat have given
With no more sign of reverence than a beard.
And when we halted at that other well,
And I was faint to swooning, and you lay
Foot-gilt with all the blossom-dust of those
Deep meadows we had traversed, did you know
That Vivien bathed your feet before her own?
And yet no thanks: and all through this wild wood
And all this morning when I fondled you:
Boon, ay, there was a boon, one not so strange—
How had I wronged you? surely ye are wise,
But such a silence is more wise than kind.'

And Merlin locked his hand in hers and said:
'O did ye never lie upon the shore,
And watch the curled white of the coming wave
Glassed in the slippery sand before it breaks?
Even such a wave, but not so pleasurable,
Dark in the glass of some presageful mood,
Had I for three days seen, ready to fall.
And then I rose and fled from Arthur's court
To break the mood. You followed me unasked;
And when I looked, and saw you following me still,
My mind involved yourself the nearest thing
In that mind-mist: for shall I tell you truth?
You seemed that wave about to break upon me
And sweep me from my hold upon the world,
My use and name and fame. Your pardon, child.
Your pretty sports have brightened all again.
And ask your boon, for boon I owe you thrice,
Once for wrong done you by confusion, next
For thanks it seems till now neglected, last
For these your dainty gambols: wherefore ask;
And take this boon so strange and not so strange.'

And Vivien answered smiling mournfully:
'O not so strange as my long asking it,
Not yet so strange as you yourself are strange,
Nor half so strange as that dark mood of yours.
I ever feared ye were not wholly mine;
And see, yourself have owned ye did me wrong.
The people call you prophet: let it be:
But not of those that can expound themselves.
Take Vivien for expounder; she will call
That three-days-long presageful gloom of yours
No presage, but the same mistrustful mood
That makes you seem less noble than yourself,

Whenever I have asked this very boon,
Now asked again: for see you not, dear love,
That such a mood as that, which lately gloomed
Your fancy when ye saw me following you,
Must make me fear still more you are not mine,
Must make me yearn still more to prove you mine,
And make me wish still more to learn this charm
Of woven paces and of waving hands,
As proof of trust. O Merlin, teach it me.
The charm so taught will charm us both to rest.
For, grant me some slight power upon your fate,
I, feeling that you felt me worthy trust,
Should rest and let you rest, knowing you mine.
And therefore be as great as ye are named,
Not muffled round with selfish reticence.
How hard you look and how denyingly!
O, if you think this wickedness in me,
That I should prove it on you unawares,
That makes me passing wrathful; then our bond
Had best be loosed for ever: but think or not,
By Heaven that hears I tell you the clean truth,
As clean as blood of babes, as white as milk:
O Merlin, may this earth, if ever I,
If these unwitty wandering wits of mine,
Even in the jumbled rubbish of a dream,
Have tript on such conjectural treachery—
May this hard earth cleave to the Nadir hell
Down, down, and close again, and nip me flat,
If I be such a traitress. Yield my boon,
Till which I scarce can yield you all I am;
And grant my re-reiterated wish,
The great proof of your love: because I think,
However wise, ye hardly know me yet.’

And Merlin loosed his hand from hers and said,
‘I never was less wise, however wise,
Too curious Vivien, though you talk of trust,
Than when I told you first of such a charm.
Yea, if ye talk of trust I tell you this,
Too much I trusted when I told you that,
And stirred this vice in you which ruined man
Through woman the first hour; for howsoe’er
In children a great curiousness be well,
Who have to learn themselves and all the world,
In you, that are no child, for still I find
Your face is practised when I spell the lines,
I call it,—well, I will not call it vice:
But since you name yourself the summer fly,
I well could wish a cobweb for the gnat,
That settles, beaten back, and beaten back
Settles, till one could yield for weariness:
But since I will not yield to give you power
Upon my life and use and name and fame,
Why will ye never ask some other boon?
Yea, by God’s rood, I trusted you too much.’

And Vivien, like the tenderest-hearted maid
That ever bided tryst at village stile,
Made answer, either eyelid wet with tears:
'Nay, Master, be not wrathful with your maid;
Caress her: let her feel herself forgiven
Who feels no heart to ask another boon.
I think ye hardly know the tender rhyme
Of "trust me not at all or all in all."
I heard the great Sir Lancelot sing it once,
And it shall answer for me. Listen to it.

"In Love, if Love be Love, if Love be ours,
Faith and unfaith can ne'er be equal powers:
Unfaith in aught is want of faith in all.

"It is the little rift within the lute,
That by and by will make the music mute,
And ever widening slowly silence all.

"The little rift within the lover's lute
Or little pitted speck in garnered fruit,
That rotting inward slowly moulders all.

"It is not worth the keeping: let it go:
But shall it? answer, darling, answer, no.
And trust me not at all or all in all."

O Master, do ye love my tender rhyme?'
And Merlin looked and half believed her true,
So tender was her voice, so fair her face,
So sweetly gleamed her eyes behind her tears
Like sunlight on the plain behind a shower:
And yet he answered half indignantly:

'Far other was the song that once I heard
By this huge oak, sung nearly where we sit:
For here we met, some ten or twelve of us,
To chase a creature that was current then
In these wild woods, the hart with golden horns.
It was the time when first the question rose
About the founding of a Table Round,
That was to be, for love of God and men
And noble deeds, the flower of all the world.
And each incited each to noble deeds.
And while we waited, one, the youngest of us,
We could not keep him silent, out he flashed,
And into such a song, such fire for fame,
Such trumpet-glowings in it, coming down
To such a stern and iron-clashing close,
That when he stopt we longed to hurl together,
And should have done it; but the beauteous beast
Scared by the noise upstarted at our feet,
And like a silver shadow slipt away
Through the dim land; and all day long we rode
Through the dim land against a rushing wind,
That glorious roundel echoing in our ears,
And chased the flashes of his golden horns
Till they vanished by the fairy well
That laughs at iron—as our warriors did—

Where children cast their pins and nails, and cry,
"Laugh, little well!" but touch it with a sword,
It buzzes fiercely round the point; and there
We lost him: such a noble song was that.
But, Vivien, when you sang me that sweet rhyme,
I felt as though you knew this cursed charm,
Were proving it on me, and that I lay
And felt them slowly ebbing, name and fame.'

And Vivien answered smiling mournfully:
'O mine have ebbed away for evermore,
And all through following you to this wild wood,
Because I saw you sad, to comfort you.
Lo now, what hearts have men! they never mount
As high as woman in her selfless mood.
And touching fame, howe'er ye scorn my song,
Take one verse more—the lady speaks it—this:

"My name, once mine, now thine, is closelier mine,
For fame, could fame be mine, that fame were thine,
And shame, could shame be thine, that shame were mine.
So trust me not at all or all in all."

'Says she not well? and there is more—this rhyme
Is like the fair pearl-necklace of the Queen,
That burst in dancing, and the pearls were spilt;
Some lost, some stolen, some as relics kept.
But nevermore the same two sister pearls
Ran down the silken thread to kiss each other
On her white neck—so is it with this rhyme:
It lives dispersedly in many hands,
And every minstrel sings it differently;
Yet is there one true line, the pearl of pearls:
"Man dreams of Fame while woman wakes to love."
Yea! Love, though Love were of the grossest, carves
A portion from the solid present, eats
And uses, careless of the rest; but Fame,
The Fame that follows death is nothing to us;
And what is Fame in life but half-disfame,
And counterchanged with darkness? ye yourself
Know well that Envy calls you Devil's son,
And since ye seem the Master of all Art,
They fain would make you Master of all vice.'

And Merlin locked his hand in hers and said,
'I once was looking for a magic weed,
And found a fair young squire who sat alone,
Had carved himself a knightly shield of wood,
And then was painting on it fancied arms,
Azure, an Eagle rising or, the Sun
In dexter chief; the scroll "I follow fame."
And speaking not, but leaning over him
I took his brush and blotted out the bird,
And made a Gardener putting in a graff,
With this for motto, "Rather use than fame."
You should have seen him blush; but afterwards
He made a stalwart knight. O Vivien,
For you, methinks you think you love me well;

For me, I love you somewhat; rest: and Love
 Should have some rest and pleasure in himself,
 Not ever be too curious for a boon,
 Too prurient for a proof against the grain
 Of him ye say ye love: but Fame with men,
 Being but ampler means to serve mankind,
 Should have small rest or pleasure in herself,
 But work as vassal to the larger love,
 That dwarfs the petty love of one to one.
 Use gave me Fame at first, and Fame again
 Increasing gave me use. Lo, there my boon!
 What other? for men sought to prove me vile,
 Because I fain had given them greater wits:
 And then did Envy call me Devil's son:
 The sick weak beast seeking to help herself
 By striking at her better, missed, and brought
 Her own claw back, and wounded her own heart.
 Sweet were the days when I was all unknown,
 But when my name was lifted up, the storm
 Brake on the mountain and I cared not for it.
 Right well know I that Fame is half-disfame,
 Yet needs must work my work. That other fame,
 To one at least, who hath not children, vague,
 The cackle of the unborn about the grave,
 I cared not for it: a single misty star,
 Which is the second in a line of stars
 That seem a sword beneath a belt of three,
 I never gazed upon it but I dreamt
 Of some vast charm concluded in that star
 To make fame nothing. Wherefore, if I fear,
 Giving you power upon me through this charm,
 That you might play me falsely, having power,
 However well ye think ye love me now
 (As sons of kings loving in pupilage
 Have turned to tyrants when they came to power)
 I rather dread the loss of use than fame;
 If you—and not so much from wickedness,
 As some wild turn of anger, or a mood
 Of overstrained affection, it may be,
 To keep me all to your own self,—or else
 A sudden spurt of woman's jealousy,—
 Should try this charm on whom ye say ye love.'

And Vivien answered smiling as in wrath:
 'Have I not sworn? I am not trusted. Good!
 Well, hide it, hide it; I shall find it out;
 And being found take heed of Vivien.
 A woman and not trusted, doubtless I
 Might feel some sudden turn of anger born
 Of your misfaith; and your fine epithet
 Is accurate too, for this full love of mine
 Without the full heart back may merit well
 Your term of overstrained. So used as I,
 My daily wonder is, I love at all.
 And as to woman's jealousy, O why not?

O to what end, except a jealous one,
And one to make me jealous if I love,
Was this fair charm invented by yourself?
I well believe that all about this world
Ye cage a buxom captive here and there,
Closed in the four walls of a hollow tower
From which is no escape for evermore.’
Then the great Master merrily answered her:
’Full many a love in loving youth was mine;
I needed then no charm to keep them mine
But youth and love; and that full heart of yours
Whereof ye prattle, may now assure you mine;
So live uncharmed. For those who wrought it first,
The wrist is parted from the hand that waved,
The feet unmortised from their ankle-bones
Who paced it, ages back: but will ye hear
The legend as in guerdon for your rhyme?
’There lived a king in the most Eastern East,
Less old than I, yet older, for my blood
Hath earnest in it of far springs to be.
A tawny pirate anchored in his port,
Whose bark had plundered twenty nameless isles;
And passing one, at the high peep of dawn,
He saw two cities in a thousand boats
All fighting for a woman on the sea.
And pushing his black craft among them all,
He lightly scattered theirs and brought her off,
With loss of half his people arrow-slain;
A maid so smooth, so white, so wonderful,
They said a light came from her when she moved:
And since the pirate would not yield her up,
The King impaled him for his piracy;
Then made her Queen: but those isle-nurtured eyes
Waged such unwilling though successful war
On all the youth, they sickened; councils thinned,
And armies waned, for magnet-like she drew
The rustiest iron of old fighters’ hearts;
And beasts themselves would worship; camels knelt
Unbidden, and the brutes of mountain back
That carry kings in castles, bowed black knees
Of homage, ringing with their serpent hands,
To make her smile, her golden ankle-bells.
What wonder, being jealous, that he sent
His horns of proclamation out through all
The hundred under-kingdoms that he swayed
To find a wizard who might teach the King
Some charm, which being wrought upon the Queen
Might keep her all his own: to such a one
He promised more than ever king has given,
A league of mountain full of golden mines,
A province with a hundred miles of coast,
A palace and a princess, all for him:
But on all those who tried and failed, the King
Pronounced a dismal sentence, meaning by it

To keep the list low and pretenders back,
Or like a king, not to be trifled with—
Their heads should moulder on the city gates.
And many tried and failed, because the charm
Of nature in her overbore their own:
And many a wizard brow bleached on the walls:
And many weeks a troop of carrion crows
Hung like a cloud above the gateway towers.’

And Vivien breaking in upon him, said:
‘I sit and gather honey; yet, methinks,
Thy tongue has tript a little: ask thyself.
The lady never made unwilling war
With those fine eyes: she had her pleasure in it,
And made her good man jealous with good cause.
And lived there neither dame nor damsel then
Wroth at a lover’s loss? were all as tame,
I mean, as noble, as the Queen was fair?
Not one to flirt a venom at her eyes,
Or pinch a murderous dust into her drink,
Or make her paler with a poisoned rose?
Well, those were not our days: but did they find
A wizard? Tell me, was he like to thee?

She ceased, and made her lithe arm round his neck
Tighten, and then drew back, and let her eyes
Speak for her, glowing on him, like a bride’s
On her new lord, her own, the first of men.

He answered laughing, ‘Nay, not like to me.
At last they found—his foragers for charms—
A little glassy-headed hairless man,
Who lived alone in a great wild on grass;
Read but one book, and ever reading grew
So grated down and filed away with thought,
So lean his eyes were monstrous; while the skin
Clung but to crate and basket, ribs and spine.
And since he kept his mind on one sole aim,
Nor ever touched fierce wine, nor tasted flesh,
Nor owned a sensual wish, to him the wall
That sunders ghosts and shadow-casting men
Became a crystal, and he saw them through it,
And heard their voices talk behind the wall,
And learnt their elemental secrets, powers
And forces; often o’er the sun’s bright eye
Drew the vast eyelid of an inky cloud,
And lashed it at the base with slanting storm;
Or in the noon of mist and driving rain,
When the lake whitened and the pinewood roared,
And the cairned mountain was a shadow, sunned
The world to peace again: here was the man.
And so by force they dragged him to the King.
And then he taught the King to charm the Queen
In such-wise, that no man could see her more,
Nor saw she save the King, who wrought the charm,
Coming and going, and she lay as dead,
And lost all use of life: but when the King

Made proffer of the league of golden mines,
The province with a hundred miles of coast,
The palace and the princess, that old man
Went back to his old wild, and lived on grass,
And vanished, and his book came down to me.'

And Vivien answered smiling saucily:
'Ye have the book: the charm is written in it:
Good: take my counsel: let me know it at once:
For keep it like a puzzle chest in chest,
With each chest locked and padlocked thirty-fold,
And whelm all this beneath as vast a mound
As after furious battle turfs the slain
On some wild down above the windy deep,
I yet should strike upon a sudden means
To dig, pick, open, find and read the charm:
Then, if I tried it, who should blame me then?'

And smiling as a master smiles at one
That is not of his school, nor any school
But that where blind and naked Ignorance
Delivers brawling judgments, unashamed,
On all things all day long, he answered her:

'Thou read the book, my pretty Vivien!
O ay, it is but twenty pages long,
But every page having an ample marge,
And every marge enclosing in the midst
A square of text that looks a little blot,
The text no larger than the limbs of fleas;
And every square of text an awful charm,
Writ in a language that has long gone by.
So long, that mountains have arisen since
With cities on their flanks—thou read the book!
And ever margin scribbled, crost, and crammed
With comment, densest condensation, hard
To mind and eye; but the long sleepless nights
Of my long life have made it easy to me.
And none can read the text, not even I;
And none can read the comment but myself;
And in the comment did I find the charm.
O, the results are simple; a mere child
Might use it to the harm of anyone,
And never could undo it: ask no more:
For though you should not prove it upon me,
But keep that oath ye sware, ye might, perchance,
Assay it on some one of the Table Round,
And all because ye dream they babble of you.'

And Vivien, frowning in true anger, said:
'What dare the full-fed liars say of me?
They ride abroad redressing human wrongs!
They sit with knife in meat and wine in horn!
They bound to holy vows of chastity!
Were I not woman, I could tell a tale.
But you are man, you well can understand
The shame that cannot be explained for shame.
Not one of all the drove should touch me: swine!'

Then answered Merlin careless of her words:
'You breathe but accusation vast and vague,
Spleen-born, I think, and proofless. If ye know,
Set up the charge ye know, to stand or fall!'
And Vivien answered frowning wrathfully:
'O ay, what say ye to Sir Valence, him
Whose kinsman left him watcher o'er his wife
And two fair babes, and went to distant lands;
Was one year gone, and on returning found
Not two but three? there lay the reckling, one
But one hour old! What said the happy sire?'
A seven-months' babe had been a truer gift.
Those twelve sweet moons confused his fatherhood.'

Then answered Merlin, 'Nay, I know the tale.
Sir Valence wedded with an outland dame:
Some cause had kept him sundered from his wife:
One child they had: it lived with her: she died:
His kinsman travelling on his own affair
Was charged by Valence to bring home the child.
He brought, not found it therefore: take the truth.'
'O ay,' said Vivien, 'overtrue a tale.
What say ye then to sweet Sir Sagramore,
That ardent man? "to pluck the flower in season,"
So says the song, "I trow it is no treason."
O Master, shall we call him overquick
To crop his own sweet rose before the hour?'

And Merlin answered, 'Overquick art thou
To catch a loathly plume fallen from the wing
Of that foul bird of rapine whose whole prey
Is man's good name: he never wronged his bride.
I know the tale. An angry gust of wind
Puffed out his torch among the myriad-roomed
And many-corridor'd complexities
Of Arthur's palace: then he found a door,
And darkling felt the sculptured ornament
That wreathen round it made it seem his own;
And wearied out made for the couch and slept,
A stainless man beside a stainless maid;
And either slept, nor knew of other there;
Till the high dawn piercing the royal rose
In Arthur's casement glimmered chastely down,
Blushing upon them blushing, and at once
He rose without a word and parted from her:
But when the thing was blazed about the court,
The brute world howling forced them into bonds,
And as it chanced they are happy, being pure.'

'O ay,' said Vivien, 'that were likely too.
What say ye then to fair Sir Percivale
And of the horrid foulness that he wrought,
The saintly youth, the spotless lamb of Christ,
Or some black wether of St Satan's fold.
What, in the precincts of the chapel-yard,
Among the knightly brasses of the graves,
And by the cold Hic Jacets of the dead!'

And Merlin answered careless of her charge,
'A sober man is Percivale and pure;
But once in life was flustered with new wine,
Then paced for coolness in the chapel-yard;
Where one of Satan's shepherdesses caught
And meant to stamp him with her master's mark;
And that he sinned is not believable;
For, look upon his face!—but if he sinned,
The sin that practice burns into the blood,
And not the one dark hour which brings remorse,
Will brand us, after, of whose fold we be:
Or else were he, the holy king, whose hymns
Are chanted in the minster, worse than all.
But is your spleen frothed out, or have ye more?'
And Vivien answered frowning yet in wrath:
'O ay; what say ye to Sir Lancelot, friend
Traitor or true? that commerce with the Queen,
I ask you, is it clamoured by the child,
Or whispered in the corner? do ye know it?'
To which he answered sadly, 'Yea, I know it.
Sir Lancelot went ambassador, at first,
To fetch her, and she watched him from her walls.
A rumour runs, she took him for the King,
So fixt her fancy on him: let them be.
But have ye no one word of loyal praise
For Arthur, blameless King and stainless man?'
She answered with a low and chuckling laugh:
'Man! is he man at all, who knows and winks?
Sees what his fair bride is and does, and winks?
By which the good King means to blind himself,
And blinds himself and all the Table Round
To all the foulness that they work. Myself
Could call him (were it not for womanhood)
The pretty, popular cause such manhood earns,
Could call him the main cause of all their crime;
Yea, were he not crowned King, coward, and fool.'
Then Merlin to his own heart, loathing, said:
'O true and tender! O my liege and King!
O selfless man and stainless gentleman,
Who wouldst against thine own eye-witness fain
Have all men true and leal, all women pure;
How, in the mouths of base interpreters,
From over-fineness not intelligible
To things with every sense as false and foul
As the poached filth that floods the middle street,
Is thy white blamelessness accounted blame!'
But Vivien, deeming Merlin overborne
By instance, recommenced, and let her tongue
Rage like a fire among the noblest names,
Polluting, and imputing her whole self,
Defaming and defacing, till she left
Not even Lancelot brave, nor Galahad clean.
Her words had issue other than she willed.
He dragged his eyebrow bushes down, and made

A snowy penthouse for his hollow eyes,
 And muttered in himself, 'Tell her the charm!
 So, if she had it, would she rail on me
 To snare the next, and if she have it not
 So will she rail. What did the wanton say?
 "Not mount as high;" we scarce can sink as low:
 For men at most differ as Heaven and earth,
 But women, worst and best, as Heaven and Hell.
 I know the Table Round, my friends of old;
 All brave, and many generous, and some chaste.
 She cloaks the scar of some repulse with lies;
 I well believe she tempted them and failed,
 Being so bitter: for fine plots may fail,
 Though harlots paint their talk as well as face
 With colours of the heart that are not theirs.
 I will not let her know: nine tithes of times
 Face-flatterer and backbiter are the same.
 And they, sweet soul, that most impute a crime
 Are pronest to it, and impute themselves,
 Wanting the mental range; or low desire
 Not to feel lowest makes them level all;
 Yea, they would pare the mountain to the plain,
 To leave an equal baseness; and in this
 Are harlots like the crowd, that if they find
 Some stain or blemish in a name of note,
 Not grieving that their greatest are so small,
 Inflate themselves with some insane delight,
 And judge all nature from her feet of clay,
 Without the will to lift their eyes, and see
 Her godlike head crowned with spiritual fire,
 And touching other worlds. I am weary of her.'

He spoke in words part heard, in whispers part,
 Half-suffocated in the hoary fell
 And many-wintered fleece of throat and chin.
 But Vivien, gathering somewhat of his mood,
 And hearing 'harlot' muttered twice or thrice,
 Leapt from her session on his lap, and stood
 Stiff as a viper frozen; loathsome sight,
 How from the rosy lips of life and love,
 Flashed the bare-grinning skeleton of death!
 White was her cheek; sharp breaths of anger puffed
 Her fairy nostril out; her hand half-clenched
 Went faltering sideways downward to her belt,
 And feeling; had she found a dagger there
 (For in a wink the false love turns to hate)
 She would have stabbed him; but she found it not:
 His eye was calm, and suddenly she took
 To bitter weeping like a beaten child,
 A long, long weeping, not consolable.
 Then her false voice made way, broken with sobs:
 'O crueller than was ever told in tale,
 Or sung in song! O vainly lavished love!
 O cruel, there was nothing wild or strange,
 Or seeming shameful—for what shame in love,

So love be true, and not as yours is—nothing
Poor Vivien had not done to win his trust
Who called her what he called her—all her crime,
All—all—the wish to prove him wholly hers.’
She mused a little, and then clapt her hands
Together with a wailing shriek, and said:
‘Stabbed through the heart’s affections to the heart!
Seethed like the kid in its own mother’s milk!
Killed with a word worse than a life of blows!
I thought that he was gentle, being great:
O God, that I had loved a smaller man!
I should have found in him a greater heart.
O, I, that flattering my true passion, saw
The knights, the court, the King, dark in your light,
Who loved to make men darker than they are,
Because of that high pleasure which I had
To seat you sole upon my pedestal
Of worship—I am answered, and henceforth
The course of life that seemed so flowery to me
With you for guide and master, only you,
Becomes the sea-cliff pathway broken short,
And ending in a ruin—nothing left,
But into some low cave to crawl, and there,
If the wolf spare me, weep my life away,
Killed with inutterable unkindliness.’
She paused, she turned away, she hung her head,
The snake of gold slid from her hair, the braid
Slipt and uncoiled itself, she wept afresh,
And the dark wood grew darker toward the storm
In silence, while his anger slowly died
Within him, till he let his wisdom go
For ease of heart, and half believed her true:
Called her to shelter in the hollow oak,
‘Come from the storm,’ and having no reply,
Gazed at the heaving shoulder, and the face
Hand-hidden, as for utmost grief or shame;
Then thrice essayed, by tenderest-touching terms,
To sleek her ruffled peace of mind, in vain.
At last she let herself be conquered by him,
And as the cageling newly flown returns,
The seeming-injured simple-hearted thing
Came to her old perch back, and settled there.
There while she sat, half-falling from his knees,
Half-nestled at his heart, and since he saw
The slow tear creep from her closed eyelid yet,
About her, more in kindness than in love,
The gentle wizard cast a shielding arm.
But she dislinked herself at once and rose,
Her arms upon her breast across, and stood,
A virtuous gentlewoman deeply wronged,
Upright and flushed before him: then she said:
‘There must now be no passages of love
Betwixt us twain henceforward evermore;
Since, if I be what I am grossly called,

What should be granted which your own gross heart
Would reckon worth the taking? I will go.
In truth, but one thing now—better have died
Thrice than have asked it once—could make me stay—
That proof of trust—so often asked in vain!
How justly, after that vile term of yours,
I find with grief! I might believe you then,
Who knows? once more. Lo! what was once to me
Mere matter of the fancy, now hath grown
The vast necessity of heart and life.
Farewell; think gently of me, for I fear
My fate or folly, passing gayer youth
For one so old, must be to love thee still.
But ere I leave thee let me swear once more
That if I schemed against thy peace in this,
May yon just heaven, that darkens o'er me, send
One flash, that, missing all things else, may make
My scheming brain a cinder, if I lie.'

Scarce had she ceased, when out of heaven a bolt
(For now the storm was close above them) struck,
Furrowing a giant oak, and javelining
With darted spikes and splinters of the wood
The dark earth round. He raised his eyes and saw
The tree that shone white-listed through the gloom.
But Vivien, fearing heaven had heard her oath,
And dazzled by the livid-flickering fork,
And deafened with the stammering cracks and claps
That followed, flying back and crying out,
'O Merlin, though you do not love me, save,
Yet save me!' clung to him and hugged him close;
And called him dear protector in her fright,
Nor yet forgot her practice in her fright,
But wrought upon his mood and hugged him close.
The pale blood of the wizard at her touch
Took gayer colours, like an opal warmed.
She blamed herself for telling hearsay tales:
She shook from fear, and for her fault she wept
Of petulancy; she called him lord and liege,
Her seer, her bard, her silver star of eve,
Her God, her Merlin, the one passionate love
Of her whole life; and ever overhead
Bellowed the tempest, and the rotten branch
Snapt in the rushing of the river-rain
Above them; and in change of glare and gloom
Her eyes and neck glittering went and came;
Till now the storm, its burst of passion spent,
Moaning and calling out of other lands,
Had left the ravaged woodland yet once more
To peace; and what should not have been had been,
For Merlin, overtalked and overworn,
Had yielded, told her all the charm, and slept.

Then, in one moment, she put forth the charm
Of woven paces and of waving hands,
And in the hollow oak he lay as dead,

And lost to life and use and name and fame.
Then crying 'I have made his glory mine,'
And shrieking out 'O fool!' the harlot leapt
Adown the forest, and the thicket closed
Behind her, and the forest echoed 'fool.'

Lancelot and Elaine

Elaine the fair, Elaine the loveable,
Elaine, the lily maid of Astolat,
High in her chamber up a tower to the east
Guarded the sacred shield of Lancelot;
Which first she placed where the morning's earliest ray
Might strike it, and awake her with the gleam;
Then fearing rust or soilure fashioned for it
A case of silk, and braided thereupon
All the devices blazoned on the shield
In their own tinct, and added, of her wit,
A border fantasy of branch and flower,
And yellow-throated nestling in the nest.
Nor rested thus content, but day by day,
Leaving her household and good father, climbed
That eastern tower, and entering barred her door,
Stript off the case, and read the naked shield,
Now guessed a hidden meaning in his arms,
Now made a pretty history to herself
Of every dint a sword had beaten in it,
And every scratch a lance had made upon it,
Conjecturing when and where: this cut is fresh;
That ten years back; this dealt him at Caerlyle;
That at Caerleon; this at Camelot:
And ah God's mercy, what a stroke was there!
And here a thrust that might have killed, but God
Broke the strong lance, and rolled his enemy down,
And saved him: so she lived in fantasy.

How came the lily maid by that good shield
Of Lancelot, she that knew not even his name?
He left it with her, when he rode to tilt
For the great diamond in the diamond jousts,
Which Arthur had ordained, and by that name
Had named them, since a diamond was the prize.

For Arthur, long before they crowned him King,
Roving the trackless realms of Lyonesse,
Had found a glen, gray boulder and black tarn.
A horror lived about the tarn, and clave
Like its own mists to all the mountain side:
For here two brothers, one a king, had met
And fought together; but their names were lost;
And each had slain his brother at a blow;
And down they fell and made the glen abhorred:
And there they lay till all their bones were bleached,
And lichened into colour with the crags:
And he, that once was king, had on a crown
Of diamonds, one in front, and four aside.
And Arthur came, and labouring up the pass,

All in a misty moonshine, unawares
 Had trodden that crowned skeleton, and the skull
 Brake from the nape, and from the skull the crown
 Rolled into light, and turning on its rims
 Fled like a glittering rivulet to the tarn:
 And down the shingly scaur he plunged, and caught,
 And set it on his head, and in his heart
 Heard murmurs, 'Lo, thou likewise shalt be King.'
 Thereafter, when a King, he had the gems
 Plucked from the crown, and showed them to his knights,
 Saying, 'These jewels, whereupon I chanced
 Divinely, are the kingdom's, not the King's—
 For public use: henceforward let there be,
 Once every year, a joust for one of these:
 For so by nine years' proof we needs must learn
 Which is our mightiest, and ourselves shall grow
 In use of arms and manhood, till we drive
 The heathen, who, some say, shall rule the land
 Hereafter, which God hinder.' Thus he spoke:
 And eight years past, eight jousts had been, and still
 Had Lancelot won the diamond of the year,
 With purpose to present them to the Queen,
 When all were won; but meaning all at once
 To snare her royal fancy with a boon
 Worth half her realm, had never spoken word.

Now for the central diamond and the last
 And largest, Arthur, holding then his court
 Hard on the river nigh the place which now
 Is this world's hugest, let proclaim a joust
 At Camelot, and when the time drew nigh
 Spake (for she had been sick) to Guinevere,
 'Are you so sick, my Queen, you cannot move
 To these fair jousts?' 'Yea, lord,' she said, 'ye know it.'
 'Then will ye miss,' he answered, 'the great deeds
 Of Lancelot, and his prowess in the lists,
 A sight ye love to look on.' And the Queen
 Lifted her eyes, and they dwelt languidly
 On Lancelot, where he stood beside the King.
 He thinking that he read her meaning there,
 'Stay with me, I am sick; my love is more
 Than many diamonds,' yielded; and a heart
 Love-loyal to the least wish of the Queen
 (However much he yearned to make complete
 The tale of diamonds for his destined boon)
 Urged him to speak against the truth, and say,
 'Sir King, mine ancient wound is hardly whole,
 And lets me from the saddle;' and the King
 Glanced first at him, then her, and went his way.
 No sooner gone than suddenly she began:
 'To blame, my lord Sir Lancelot, much to blame!
 Why go ye not to these fair jousts? the knights
 Are half of them our enemies, and the crowd
 Will murmur, "Lo the shameless ones, who take
 Their pastime now the trustful King is gone!"'

Then Lancelot vext at having lied in vain:
'Are ye so wise? ye were not once so wise,
My Queen, that summer, when ye loved me first.
Then of the crowd ye took no more account
Than of the myriad cricket of the mead,
When its own voice clings to each blade of grass,
And every voice is nothing. As to knights,
Them surely can I silence with all ease.
But now my loyal worship is allowed
Of all men: many a bard, without offence,
Has linked our names together in his lay,
Lancelot, the flower of bravery, Guinevere,
The pearl of beauty: and our knights at feast
Have pledged us in this union, while the King
Would listen smiling. How then? is there more?
Has Arthur spoken aught? or would yourself,
Now weary of my service and devoir,
Henceforth be truer to your faultless lord?'

She broke into a little scornful laugh:
'Arthur, my lord, Arthur, the faultless King,
That passionate perfection, my good lord—
But who can gaze upon the Sun in heaven?
He never spake word of reproach to me,
He never had a glimpse of mine untruth,
He cares not for me: only here today
There gleamed a vague suspicion in his eyes:
Some meddling rogue has tampered with him—else
Rapt in this fancy of his Table Round,
And swearing men to vows impossible,
To make them like himself: but, friend, to me
He is all fault who hath no fault at all:
For who loves me must have a touch of earth;
The low sun makes the colour: I am yours,
Not Arthur's, as ye know, save by the bond.
And therefore hear my words: go to the jousts:
The tiny-trumpeting gnat can break our dream
When sweetest; and the vermin voices here
May buzz so loud—we scorn them, but they sting.'

Then answered Lancelot, the chief of knights:
'And with what face, after my pretext made,
Shall I appear, O Queen, at Camelot, I
Before a King who honours his own word,
As if it were his God's?'

'Yea,' said the Queen,
'A moral child without the craft to rule,
Else had he not lost me: but listen to me,
If I must find you wit: we hear it said
That men go down before your spear at a touch,
But knowing you are Lancelot; your great name,
This conquers: hide it therefore; go unknown:
Win! by this kiss you will: and our true King
Will then allow your pretext, O my knight,
As all for glory; for to speak him true,
Ye know right well, how meek soe'er he seem,

No keener hunter after glory breathes.
 He loves it in his knights more than himself:
 They prove to him his work: win and return.'
 Then got Sir Lancelot suddenly to horse,
 Wroth at himself. Not willing to be known,
 He left the barren-beaten thoroughfare,
 Chose the green path that showed the rarer foot,
 And there among the solitary downs,
 Full often lost in fancy, lost his way;
 Till as he traced a faintly-shadowed track,
 That all in loops and links among the dales
 Ran to the Castle of Astolat, he saw
 Fired from the west, far on a hill, the towers.
 Thither he made, and blew the gateway horn.
 Then came an old, dumb, myriad-wrinkled man,
 Who let him into lodging and disarmed.
 And Lancelot marvelled at the wordless man;
 And issuing found the Lord of Astolat
 With two strong sons, Sir Torre and Sir Lavaine,
 Moving to meet him in the castle court;
 And close behind them stept the lily maid
 Elaine, his daughter: mother of the house
 There was not: some light jest among them rose
 With laughter dying down as the great knight
 Approached them: then the Lord of Astolat:
 'Whence comes thou, my guest, and by what name
 Livest thou between the lips? for by thy state
 And presence I might guess thee chief of those,
 After the King, who eat in Arthur's halls.
 Him have I seen: the rest, his Table Round,
 Known as they are, to me they are unknown.'
 Then answered Sir Lancelot, the chief of knights:
 'Known am I, and of Arthur's hall, and known,
 What I by mere mischance have brought, my shield.
 But since I go to joust as one unknown
 At Camelot for the diamond, ask me not,
 Hereafter ye shall know me—and the shield—
 I pray you lend me one, if such you have,
 Blank, or at least with some device not mine.'
 Then said the Lord of Astolat, 'Here is Torre's:
 Hurt in his first tilt was my son, Sir Torre.
 And so, God wot, his shield is blank enough.
 His ye can have.' Then added plain Sir Torre,
 'Yea, since I cannot use it, ye may have it.'
 Here laughed the father saying, 'Fie, Sir Churl,
 Is that answer for a noble knight?
 Allow him! but Lavaine, my younger here,
 He is so full of lustihood, he will ride,
 Joust for it, and win, and bring it in an hour,
 And set it in this damsel's golden hair,
 To make her thrice as wilful as before.'
 'Nay, father, nay good father, shame me not
 Before this noble knight,' said young Lavaine,
 'For nothing. Surely I but played on Torre:

He seemed so sullen, vext he could not go:
A jest, no more! for, knight, the maiden dreamt
That some one put this diamond in her hand,
And that it was too slippery to be held,
And slipt and fell into some pool or stream,
The castle-well, belike; and then I said
That if I went and if I fought and won it
(But all was jest and joke among ourselves)
Then must she keep it safelier. All was jest.
But, father, give me leave, an if he will,
To ride to Camelot with this noble knight:
Win shall I not, but do my best to win:
Young as I am, yet would I do my best.'
'So will ye grace me,' answered Lancelot,
Smiling a moment, 'with your fellowship
O'er these waste downs whereon I lost myself,
Then were I glad of you as guide and friend:
And you shall win this diamond,—as I hear
It is a fair large diamond,—if ye may,
And yield it to this maiden, if ye will.'
'A fair large diamond,' added plain Sir Torre,
'Such be for queens, and not for simple maids.'
Then she, who held her eyes upon the ground,
Elaine, and heard her name so tost about,
Flushed slightly at the slight disparagement
Before the stranger knight, who, looking at her,
Full courtly, yet not falsely, thus returned:
'If what is fair be but for what is fair,
And only queens are to be counted so,
Rash were my judgment then, who deem this maid
Might wear as fair a jewel as is on earth,
Not violating the bond of like to like.'
He spoke and ceased: the lily maid Elaine,
Won by the mellow voice before she looked,
Lifted her eyes, and read his lineaments.
The great and guilty love he bare the Queen,
In battle with the love he bare his lord,
Had marred his face, and marked it ere his time.
Another sinning on such heights with one,
The flower of all the west and all the world,
Had been the sleeker for it: but in him
His mood was often like a fiend, and rose
And drove him into wastes and solitudes
For agony, who was yet a living soul.
Marred as he was, he seemed the goodliest man
That ever among ladies ate in hall,
And noblest, when she lifted up her eyes.
However marred, of more than twice her years,
Seamed with an ancient swordcut on the cheek,
And bruised and bronzed, she lifted up her eyes
And loved him, with that love which was her doom.
Then the great knight, the darling of the court,
Loved of the loveliest, into that rude hall
Stept with all grace, and not with half disdain

Hid under grace, as in a smaller time,
But kindly man moving among his kind:
Whom they with meats and vintage of their best
And talk and minstrel melody entertained.
And much they asked of court and Table Round,
And ever well and readily answered he:
But Lancelot, when they glanced at Guinevere,
Suddenly speaking of the wordless man,
Heard from the Baron that, ten years before,
The heathen caught and reft him of his tongue.
'He learnt and warned me of their fierce design
Against my house, and him they caught and maimed;
But I, my sons, and little daughter fled
From bonds or death, and dwelt among the woods
By the great river in a boatman's hut.
Dull days were those, till our good Arthur broke
The Pagan yet once more on Badon hill.'

'O there, great lord, doubtless,' Lavaine said, rapt
By all the sweet and sudden passion of youth
Toward greatness in its elder, 'you have fought.
O tell us—for we live apart—you know
Of Arthur's glorious wars.' And Lancelot spoke
And answered him at full, as having been
With Arthur in the fight which all day long
Rang by the white mouth of the violent Glem;
And in the four loud battles by the shore
Of Douglas; that on Bassa; then the war
That thundered in and out the gloomy skirts
Of Celidon the forest; and again
By castle Gurnion, where the glorious King
Had on his cuirass worn our Lady's Head,
Carved of one emerald centered in a sun
Of silver rays, that lightened as he breathed;
And at Caerleon had he helped his lord,
When the strong neighings of the wild white Horse
Set every gilded parapet shuddering;
And up in Agned-Cathregonion too,
And down the waste sand-shores of Trath Treroit,
Where many a heathen fell; 'and on the mount
Of Badon I myself beheld the King
Charge at the head of all his Table Round,
And all his legions crying Christ and him,
And break them; and I saw him, after, stand
High on a heap of slain, from spur to plume
Red as the rising sun with heathen blood,
And seeing me, with a great voice he cried,
"They are broken, they are broken!" for the King,
However mild he seems at home, nor cares
For triumph in our mimic wars, the jousts—
For if his own knight cast him down, he laughs
Saying, his knights are better men than he—
Yet in this heathen war the fire of God
Fills him: I never saw his like: there lives
No greater leader.'

While he uttered this,
Low to her own heart said the lily maid,
'Save your own great self, fair lord;' and when he fell
From talk of war to traits of pleasantry—
Being mirthful he, but in a stately kind—
She still took note that when the living smile
Died from his lips, across him came a cloud
Of melancholy severe, from which again,
Whenever in her hovering to and fro
The lily maid had striven to make him cheer,
There brake a sudden-beaming tenderness
Of manners and of nature: and she thought
That all was nature, all, perchance, for her.
And all night long his face before her lived,
As when a painter, poring on a face,
Divinely through all hindrance finds the man
Behind it, and so paints him that his face,
The shape and colour of a mind and life,
Lives for his children, ever at its best
And fullest; so the face before her lived,
Dark-splendid, speaking in the silence, full
Of noble things, and held her from her sleep.
Till rathe she rose, half-cheated in the thought
She needs must bid farewell to sweet Lavaine.
First in fear, step after step, she stole
Down the long tower-stairs, hesitating:
Anon, she heard Sir Lancelot cry in the court,
'This shield, my friend, where is it?' and Lavaine
Past inward, as she came from out the tower.
There to his proud horse Lancelot turned, and smoothed
The glossy shoulder, humming to himself.
Half-jealous of the flattering hand, she drew
Nearer and stood. He looked, and more amazed
Than if seven men had set upon him, saw
The maiden standing in the dewy light.
He had not dreamed she was so beautiful.
Then came on him a sort of sacred fear,
For silent, though he greeted her, she stood
Rapt on his face as if it were a God's.
Suddenly flashed on her a wild desire,
That he should wear her favour at the tilt.
She braved a riotous heart in asking for it.
'Fair lord, whose name I know not—noble it is,
I well believe, the noblest—will you wear
My favour at this tourney?' 'Nay,' said he,
'Fair lady, since I never yet have worn
Favour of any lady in the lists.
Such is my wont, as those, who know me, know.'
'Yea, so,' she answered; 'then in wearing mine
Needs must be lesser likelihood, noble lord,
That those who know should know you.' And he turned
Her counsel up and down within his mind,
And found it true, and answered, 'True, my child.
Well, I will wear it: fetch it out to me:
What is it?' and she told him 'A red sleeve

Broidered with pearls,' and brought it: then he bound
 Her token on his helmet, with a smile
 Saying, 'I never yet have done so much
 For any maiden living,' and the blood
 Sprang to her face and filled her with delight;
 But left her all the paler, when Lavaine
 Returning brought the yet-unblazoned shield,
 His brother's; which he gave to Lancelot,
 Who parted with his own to fair Elaine:
 'Do me this grace, my child, to have my shield
 In keeping till I come.' 'A grace to me,'
 She answered, 'twice today. I am your squire!'
 Whereat Lavaine said, laughing, 'Lily maid,
 For fear our people call you lily maid
 In earnest, let me bring your colour back;
 Once, twice, and thrice: now get you hence to bed.'
 So kissed her, and Sir Lancelot his own hand,
 And thus they moved away: she stayed a minute,
 Then made a sudden step to the gate, and there—
 Her bright hair blown about the serious face
 Yet rosy-kindled with her brother's kiss—
 Paused by the gateway, standing near the shield
 In silence, while she watched their arms far-off
 Sparkle, until they dipt below the downs.
 Then to her tower she climbed, and took the shield,
 There kept it, and so lived in fantasy.

Meanwhile the new companions past away
 Far o'er the long backs of the bushless downs,
 To where Sir Lancelot knew there lived a knight
 Not far from Camelot, now for forty years
 A hermit, who had prayed, laboured and prayed,
 And ever labouring had scooped himself
 In the white rock a chapel and a hall
 On massive columns, like a shorecliff cave,
 And cells and chambers: all were fair and dry;
 The green light from the meadows underneath
 Struck up and lived along the milky roofs;
 And in the meadows tremulous aspen-trees
 And poplars made a noise of falling showers.
 And thither wending there that night they bode.

But when the next day broke from underground,
 And shot red fire and shadows through the cave,
 They rose, heard mass, broke fast, and rode away:
 Then Lancelot saying, 'Hear, but hold my name
 Hidden, you ride with Lancelot of the Lake,'
 Abashed young Lavaine, whose instant reverence,
 Dearer to true young hearts than their own praise,
 But left him leave to stammer, 'Is it indeed?'
 And after muttering 'The great Lancelot,
 At last he got his breath and answered, 'One,
 One have I seen—that other, our liege lord,
 The dread Pendragon, Britain's King of kings,
 Of whom the people talk mysteriously,
 He will be there—then were I stricken blind

That minute, I might say that I had seen.'
So spake Lavaine, and when they reached the lists
By Camelot in the meadow, let his eyes
Run through the peopled gallery which half round
Lay like a rainbow fallen upon the grass,
Until they found the clear-faced King, who sat
Robed in red samite, easily to be known,
Since to his crown the golden dragon clung,
And down his robe the dragon writhed in gold,
And from the carven-work behind him crept
Two dragons gilded, sloping down to make
Arms for his chair, while all the rest of them
Through knots and loops and folds innumerable
Fled ever through the woodwork, till they found
The new design wherein they lost themselves,
Yet with all ease, so tender was the work:
And, in the costly canopy o'er him set,
Blazed the last diamond of the nameless king.
Then Lancelot answered young Lavaine and said,
'Me you call great: mine is the firmer seat,
The truer lance: but there is many a youth
Now crescent, who will come to all I am
And overcome it; and in me there dwells
No greatness, save it be some far-off touch
Of greatness to know well I am not great:
There is the man.' And Lavaine gaped upon him
As on a thing miraculous, and anon
The trumpets blew; and then did either side,
They that assailed, and they that held the lists,
Set lance in rest, strike spur, suddenly move,
Meet in the midst, and there so furiously
Shock, that a man far-off might well perceive,
If any man that day were left afield,
The hard earth shake, and a low thunder of arms.
And Lancelot bode a little, till he saw
Which were the weaker; then he hurled into it
Against the stronger: little need to speak
Of Lancelot in his glory! King, duke, earl,
Count, baron—whom he smote, he overthrew.
But in the field were Lancelot's kith and kin,
Ranged with the Table Round that held the lists,
Strong men, and wrathful that a stranger knight
Should do and almost overdo the deeds
Of Lancelot; and one said to the other, 'Lo!
What is he? I do not mean the force alone—
The grace and versatility of the man!
Is it not Lancelot?' 'When has Lancelot worn
Favour of any lady in the lists?
Not such his wont, as we, that know him, know.'
'How then? who then?' a fury seized them all,
A fiery family passion for the name
Of Lancelot, and a glory one with theirs.
They couched their spears and pricked their steeds, and thus,
Their plumes driven backward by the wind they made

In moving, all together down upon him
 Bare, as a wild wave in the wide North-sea,
 Green-glimmering toward the summit, bears, with all
 Its stormy crests that smoke against the skies,
 Down on a bark, and overbears the bark,
 And him that helms it, so they overbore
 Sir Lancelot and his charger, and a spear
 Down-glancing lamed the charger, and a spear
 Pricked sharply his own cuirass, and the head
 Pierced through his side, and there snapt, and remained.

Then Sir Lavaine did well and worshipfully;
 He bore a knight of old repute to the earth,
 And brought his horse to Lancelot where he lay.
 He up the side, sweating with agony, got,
 But thought to do while he might yet endure,
 And being lustily holpen by the rest,
 His party,—though it seemed half-miracle
 To those he fought with,—drave his kith and kin,
 And all the Table Round that held the lists,
 Back to the barrier; then the trumpets blew
 Proclaiming his the prize, who wore the sleeve
 Of scarlet, and the pearls; and all the knights,
 His party, cried 'Advance and take thy prize
 The diamond;' but he answered, 'Diamond me
 No diamonds! for God's love, a little air!
 Prize me no prizes, for my prize is death!
 Hence will I, and I charge you, follow me not.'

He spoke, and vanished suddenly from the field
 With young Lavaine into the poplar grove.
 There from his charger down he slid, and sat,
 Gasping to Sir Lavaine, 'Draw the lance-head.'
 'Ah my sweet lord Sir Lancelot,' said Lavaine,
 'I dread me, if I draw it, you will die.'
 But he, 'I die already with it: draw—
 Draw,'—and Lavaine drew, and Sir Lancelot gave
 A marvellous great shriek and ghastly groan,
 And half his blood burst forth, and down he sank
 For the pure pain, and wholly swooned away.
 Then came the hermit out and bare him in,
 There stanchd his wound; and there, in daily doubt
 Whether to live or die, for many a week
 Hid from the wide world's rumour by the grove
 Of poplars with their noise of falling showers,
 And ever-tremulous aspen-trees, he lay.

But on that day when Lancelot fled the lists,
 His party, knights of utmost North and West,
 Lords of waste marches, kings of desolate isles,
 Came round their great Pendragon, saying to him,
 'Lo, Sire, our knight, through whom we won the day,
 Hath gone sore wounded, and hath left his prize
 Untaken, crying that his prize is death.'
 'Heaven hinder,' said the King, 'that such an one,
 So great a knight as we have seen today—
 He seemed to me another Lancelot—

Yea, twenty times I thought him Lancelot—
He must not pass uncared for. Wherefore, rise,
O Gawain, and ride forth and find the knight.
Wounded and wearied needs must he be near.
I charge you that you get at once to horse.
And, knights and kings, there breathes not one of you
Will deem this prize of ours is rashly given:
His prowess was too wondrous. We will do him
No customary honour: since the knight
Came not to us, of us to claim the prize,
Ourselves will send it after. Rise and take
This diamond, and deliver it, and return,
And bring us where he is, and how he fares,
And cease not from your quest until ye find.'

So saying, from the carven flower above,
To which it made a restless heart, he took,
And gave, the diamond: then from where he sat
At Arthur's right, with smiling face arose,
With smiling face and frowning heart, a Prince
In the mid might and flourish of his May,
Gawain, surnamed The Courteous, fair and strong,
And after Lancelot, Tristram, and Geraint
And Gareth, a good knight, but therewithal
Sir Modred's brother, and the child of Lot,
Nor often loyal to his word, and now
Wroth that the King's command to sally forth
In quest of whom he knew not, made him leave
The banquet, and concourse of knights and kings.

So all in wrath he got to horse and went;
While Arthur to the banquet, dark in mood,
Past, thinking 'Is it Lancelot who hath come
Despite the wound he spake of, all for gain
Of glory, and hath added wound to wound,
And ridden away to die?' So feared the King,
And, after two days' tarriance there, returned.
Then when he saw the Queen, embracing asked,
'Love, are you yet so sick?' 'Nay, lord,' she said.
'And where is Lancelot?' Then the Queen amazed,
'Was he not with you? won he not your prize?'
'Nay, but one like him.' 'Why that like was he.'
And when the King demanded how she knew,
Said, 'Lord, no sooner had ye parted from us,
Than Lancelot told me of a common talk
That men went down before his spear at a touch,
But knowing he was Lancelot; his great name
Conquered; and therefore would he hide his name
From all men, even the King, and to this end
Had made a pretext of a hindering wound,
That he might joust unknown of all, and learn
If his old prowess were in aught decayed;
And added, "Our true Arthur, when he learns,
Will well allow me pretext, as for gain
Of purer glory:"'

Then replied the King:

'Far lovelier in our Lancelot had it been,
 In lieu of idly dallying with the truth,
 To have trusted me as he hath trusted thee.
 Surely his King and most familiar friend
 Might well have kept his secret. True, indeed,
 Albeit I know my knights fantastical,
 So fine a fear in our large Lancelot
 Must needs have moved my laughter: now remains
 But little cause for laughter: his own kin—
 Ill news, my Queen, for all who love him, this!—
 His kith and kin, not knowing, set upon him;
 So that he went sore wounded from the field:
 Yet good news too: for goodly hopes are mine
 That Lancelot is no more a lonely heart.
 He wore, against his wont, upon his helm
 A sleeve of scarlet, broidered with great pearls,
 Some gentle maiden's gift.'

'Yea, lord,' she said,
 'Thy hopes are mine,' and saying that, she choked,
 And sharply turned about to hide her face,
 Past to her chamber, and there flung herself
 Down on the great King's couch, and writhed upon it,
 And clenched her fingers till they bit the palm,
 And shrieked out 'Traitor' to the unhearing wall,
 Then flashed into wild tears, and rose again,
 And moved about her palace, proud and pale.

Gawain the while through all the region round
 Rode with his diamond, wearied of the quest,
 Touched at all points, except the poplar grove,
 And came at last, though late, to Astolat:
 Whom glittering in enamelled arms the maid
 Glanced at, and cried, 'What news from Camelot, lord?
 What of the knight with the red sleeve?' 'He won.'
 'I knew it,' she said. 'But parted from the jousts
 Hurt in the side,' whereat she caught her breath;
 Through her own side she felt the sharp lance go;
 Thereon she smote her hand: wellnigh she swooned:
 And, while he gazed wonderingly at her, came
 The Lord of Astolat out, to whom the Prince
 Reported who he was, and on what quest
 Sent, that he bore the prize and could not find
 The victor, but had ridden a random round
 To seek him, and had wearied of the search.
 To whom the Lord of Astolat, 'Bide with us,
 And ride no more at random, noble Prince!
 Here was the knight, and here he left a shield;
 This will he send or come for: furthermore
 Our son is with him; we shall hear anon,
 Needs must hear.' To this the courteous Prince
 Accorded with his wonted courtesy,
 Courtesy with a touch of traitor in it,
 And stayed; and cast his eyes on fair Elaine:
 Where could be found face daintier? then her shape
 From forehead down to foot, perfect—again

From foot to forehead exquisitely turned:
'Well—if I bide, lo! this wild flower for me!'
And oft they met among the garden yews,
And there he set himself to play upon her
With sallying wit, free flashes from a height
Above her, graces of the court, and songs,
Sighs, and slow smiles, and golden eloquence
And amorous adulation, till the maid
Rebelled against it, saying to him, 'Prince,
O loyal nephew of our noble King,
Why ask you not to see the shield he left,
Whence you might learn his name? Why slight your King,
And lose the quest he sent you on, and prove
No surer than our falcon yesterday,
Who lost the hern we slipt her at, and went
To all the winds?' 'Nay, by mine head,' said he,
'I lose it, as we lose the lark in heaven,
O damsel, in the light of your blue eyes;
But an ye will it let me see the shield.'
And when the shield was brought, and Gawain saw
Sir Lancelot's azure lions, crowned with gold,
Ramp in the field, he smote his thigh, and mocked:
'Right was the King! our Lancelot! that true man!'
'And right was I,' she answered merrily, 'I,
Who dreamed my knight the greatest knight of all.'
'And if I dreamed,' said Gawain, 'that you love
This greatest knight, your pardon! lo, ye know it!
Speak therefore: shall I waste myself in vain?'
Full simple was her answer, 'What know I?
My brethren have been all my fellowship;
And I, when often they have talked of love,
Wished it had been my mother, for they talked,
Meseemed, of what they knew not; so myself—
I know not if I know what true love is,
But if I know, then, if I love not him,
I know there is none other I can love.'
'Yea, by God's death,' said he, 'ye love him well,
But would not, knew ye what all others know,
And whom he loves.' 'So be it,' cried Elaine,
And lifted her fair face and moved away:
But he pursued her, calling, 'Stay a little!
One golden minute's grace! he wore your sleeve:
Would he break faith with one I may not name?
Must our true man change like a leaf at last?
Nay—like enow: why then, far be it from me
To cross our mighty Lancelot in his loves!
And, damsel, for I deem you know full well
Where your great knight is hidden, let me leave
My quest with you; the diamond also: here!
For if you love, it will be sweet to give it;
And if he love, it will be sweet to have it
From your own hand; and whether he love or not,
A diamond is a diamond. Fare you well
A thousand times!—a thousand times farewell!
Yet, if he love, and his love hold, we two

May meet at court hereafter: there, I think,
So ye will learn the courtesies of the court,
We two shall know each other.'

Then he gave,
And slightly kissed the hand to which he gave,
The diamond, and all wearied of the quest
Leapt on his horse, and carolling as he went
A true-love ballad, lightly rode away.

Thence to the court he past; there told the King
What the King knew, 'Sir Lancelot is the knight.'
And added, 'Sire, my liege, so much I learnt;
But failed to find him, though I rode all round
The region: but I lighted on the maid
Whose sleeve he wore; she loves him; and to her,
Deeming our courtesy is the truest law,
I gave the diamond: she will render it;
For by mine head she knows his hiding-place.'

The seldom-frowning King frowned, and replied,
'Too courteous truly! ye shall go no more
On quest of mine, seeing that ye forget
Obedience is the courtesy due to kings.'

He spake and parted. Wroth, but all in awe,
For twenty strokes of the blood, without a word,
Lingered that other, staring after him;
Then shook his hair, strode off, and buzzed abroad
About the maid of Astolat, and her love.
All ears were pricked at once, all tongues were loosed:
'The maid of Astolat loves Sir Lancelot,
Sir Lancelot loves the maid of Astolat.'

Some read the King's face, some the Queen's, and all
Had marvel what the maid might be, but most
Predoomed her as unworthy. One old dame
Came suddenly on the Queen with the sharp news.
She, that had heard the noise of it before,
But sorrowing Lancelot should have stooped so low,
Marred her friend's aim with pale tranquillity.
So ran the tale like fire about the court,
Fire in dry stubble a nine-days' wonder flared:
Till even the knights at banquet twice or thrice
Forgot to drink to Lancelot and the Queen,
And pledging Lancelot and the lily maid
Smiled at each other, while the Queen, who sat
With lips severely placid, felt the knot
Climb in her throat, and with her feet unseen
Crushed the wild passion out against the floor
Beneath the banquet, where all the meats became
As wormwood, and she hated all who pledged.

But far away the maid in Astolat,
Her guiltless rival, she that ever kept
The one-day-seen Sir Lancelot in her heart,
Crept to her father, while he mused alone,
Sat on his knee, stroked his gray face and said,
'Father, you call me wilful, and the fault
Is yours who let me have my will, and now,

Sweet father, will you let me lose my wits?'
'Nay,' said he, 'surely.' 'Wherefore, let me hence,'
She answered, 'and find out our dear Lavaine.'
'Ye will not lose your wits for dear Lavaine:
Bide,' answered he: 'we needs must hear anon
Of him, and of that other.' 'Ay,' she said,
'And of that other, for I needs must hence
And find that other, wheresoe'er he be,
And with mine own hand give his diamond to him,
Lest I be found as faithless in the quest
As yon proud Prince who left the quest to me.
Sweet father, I behold him in my dreams
Gaunt as it were the skeleton of himself,
Death-pale, for lack of gentle maiden's aid.
The gentler-born the maiden, the more bound,
My father, to be sweet and serviceable
To noble knights in sickness, as ye know
When these have worn their tokens: let me hence
I pray you.' Then her father nodding said,
'Ay, ay, the diamond: wit ye well, my child,
Right fain were I to learn this knight were whole,
Being our greatest: yea, and you must give it—
And sure I think this fruit is hung too high
For any mouth to gape for save a queen's—
Nay, I mean nothing: so then, get you gone,
Being so very wilful you must go.'

Lightly, her suit allowed, she slept away,
And while she made her ready for her ride,
Her father's latest word hummed in her ear,
'Being so very wilful you must go,'
And changed itself and echoed in her heart,
'Being so very wilful you must die.'
But she was happy enough and shook it off,
As we shake off the bee that buzzes at us;
And in her heart she answered it and said,
'What matter, so I help him back to life?'
Then far away with good Sir Torre for guide
Rode o'er the long backs of the bushless downs
To Camelot, and before the city-gates
Came on her brother with a happy face
Making a roan horse caper and curvet
For pleasure all about a field of flowers:
Whom when she saw, 'Lavaine,' she cried, 'Lavaine,
How fares my lord Sir Lancelot?' He amazed,
'Torre and Elaine! why here? Sir Lancelot!
How know ye my lord's name is Lancelot?'
But when the maid had told him all her tale,
Then turned Sir Torre, and being in his moods
Left them, and under the strange-statued gate,
Where Arthur's wars were rendered mystically,
Past up the still rich city to his kin,
His own far blood, which dwelt at Camelot;
And her, Lavaine across the poplar grove
Led to the caves: there first she saw the casque

Of Lancelot on the wall: her scarlet sleeve,
Though carved and cut, and half the pearls away,
Streamed from it still; and in her heart she laughed,
Because he had not loosed it from his helm,
But meant once more perchance to tourney in it.
And when they gained the cell wherein he slept,
His battle-writhen arms and mighty hands
Lay naked on the wolfskin, and a dream
Of dragging down his enemy made them move.
Then she that saw him lying unsleek, unshorn,
Gaunt as it were the skeleton of himself,
Uttered a little tender dolorous cry.
The sound not wanted in a place so still
Woke the sick knight, and while he rolled his eyes
Yet blank from sleep, she started to him, saying,
'Your prize the diamond sent you by the King:'
His eyes glistened: she fancied 'Is it for me?'
And when the maid had told him all the tale
Of King and Prince, the diamond sent, the quest
Assigned to her not worthy of it, she knelt
Full lowly by the corners of his bed,
And laid the diamond in his open hand.
Her face was near, and as we kiss the child
That does the task assigned, he kissed her face.
At once she slipt like water to the floor.
'Alas,' he said, 'your ride hath wearied you.
Rest must you have.' 'No rest for me,' she said;
'Nay, for near you, fair lord, I am at rest.'
What might she mean by that? his large black eyes,
Yet larger through his leanness, dwelt upon her,
Till all her heart's sad secret blazed itself
In the heart's colours on her simple face;
And Lancelot looked and was perplexed in mind,
And being weak in body said no more;
But did not love the colour; woman's love,
Save one, he not regarded, and so turned
Sighing, and feigned a sleep until he slept.
Then rose Elaine and glided through the fields,
And past beneath the weirdly-sculptured gates
Far up the dim rich city to her kin;
There bode the night: but woke with dawn, and past
Down through the dim rich city to the fields,
Thence to the cave: so day by day she past
In either twilight ghost-like to and fro
Gliding, and every day she tended him,
And likewise many a night: and Lancelot
Would, though he called his wound a little hurt
Whereof he should be quickly whole, at times
Brain-feverous in his heat and agony, seem
Uncourteous, even he: but the meek maid
Sweetly forbore him ever, being to him
Meeker than any child to a rough nurse,
Milder than any mother to a sick child,
And never woman yet, since man's first fall,

Did kindlier unto man, but her deep love
Upbore her; till the hermit, skilled in all
The simples and the science of that time,
Told him that her fine care had saved his life.
And the sick man forgot her simple blush,
Would call her friend and sister, sweet Elaine,
Would listen for her coming and regret
Her parting step, and held her tenderly,
And loved her with all love except the love
Of man and woman when they love their best,
Closest and sweetest, and had died the death
In any knightly fashion for her sake.
And peradventure had he seen her first
She might have made this and that other world
Another world for the sick man; but now
The shackles of an old love straitened him,
His honour rooted in dishonour stood,
And faith unfaithful kept him falsely true.
Yet the great knight in his mid-sickness made
Full many a holy vow and pure resolve.
These, as but born of sickness, could not live:
For when the blood ran lustier in him again,
Full often the bright image of one face,
Making a treacherous quiet in his heart,
Dispersed his resolution like a cloud.
Then if the maiden, while that ghostly grace
Beamed on his fancy, spoke, he answered not,
Or short and coldly, and she knew right well
What the rough sickness meant, but what this meant
She knew not, and the sorrow dimmed her sight,
And drave her ere her time across the fields
Far into the rich city, where alone
She murmured, 'Vain, in vain: it cannot be.
He will not love me: how then? must I die?'
Then as a little helpless innocent bird,
That has but one plain passage of few notes,
Will sing the simple passage o'er and o'er
For all an April morning, till the ear
Wearies to hear it, so the simple maid
Went half the night repeating, 'Must I die?'
And now to right she turned, and now to left,
And found no ease in turning or in rest;
And 'Him or death,' she muttered, 'death or him,'
Again and like a burthen, 'Him or death.'
But when Sir Lancelot's deadly hurt was whole,
To Astolat returning rode the three.
There morn by morn, arraying her sweet self
In that wherein she deemed she looked her best,
She came before Sir Lancelot, for she thought
'If I be loved, these are my festal robes,
If not, the victim's flowers before he fall.'
And Lancelot ever prest upon the maid
That she should ask some goodly gift of him
For her own self or hers; 'and do not shun

To speak the wish most near to your true heart;
 Such service have ye done me, that I make
 My will of yours, and Prince and Lord am I
 In mine own land, and what I will I can.
 Then like a ghost she lifted up her face,
 But like a ghost without the power to speak.
 And Lancelot saw that she withheld her wish,
 And bode among them yet a little space
 Till he should learn it; and one morn it chanced
 He found her in among the garden yews,
 And said, 'Delay no longer, speak your wish,
 Seeing I go today:' then out she brake:
 'Going? and we shall never see you more.
 And I must die for want of one bold word.'
 'Speak: that I live to hear,' he said, 'is yours.'
 Then suddenly and passionately she spoke:
 'I have gone mad. I love you: let me die.'
 'Ah, sister,' answered Lancelot, 'what is this?'
 And innocently extending her white arms,
 'Your love,' she said, 'your love—to be your wife.'
 And Lancelot answered, 'Had I chosen to wed,
 I had been wedded earlier, sweet Elaine:
 But now there never will be wife of mine.'
 'No, no,' she cried, 'I care not to be wife,
 But to be with you still, to see your face,
 To serve you, and to follow you through the world.'
 And Lancelot answered, 'Nay, the world, the world,
 All ear and eye, with such a stupid heart
 To interpret ear and eye, and such a tongue
 To blare its own interpretation—nay,
 Full ill then should I quit your brother's love,
 And your good father's kindness.' And she said,
 'Not to be with you, not to see your face—
 Alas for me then, my good days are done.'
 'Nay, noble maid,' he answered, 'ten times nay!
 This is not love: but love's first flash in youth,
 Most common: yea, I know it of mine own self:
 And you yourself will smile at your own self
 Hereafter, when you yield your flower of life
 To one more fitly yours, not thrice your age:
 And then will I, for true you are and sweet
 Beyond mine old belief in womanhood,
 More specially should your good knight be poor,
 Endow you with broad land and territory
 Even to the half my realm beyond the seas,
 So that would make you happy: furthermore,
 Even to the death, as though ye were my blood,
 In all your quarrels will I be your knight.
 This I will do, dear damsel, for your sake,
 And more than this I cannot.'

While he spoke

She neither blushed nor shook, but deathly-pale
 Stood grasping what was nearest, then replied:
 'Of all this will I nothing:' and so fell,

And thus they bore her swooning to her tower.
Then spake, to whom through those black walls of yew
Their talk had pierced, her father: 'Ay, a flash,
I fear me, that will strike my blossom dead.
Too courteous are ye, fair Lord Lancelot.
I pray you, use some rough discourtesy
To blunt or break her passion.'

Lancelot said,
'That were against me: what I can I will;'
And there that day remained, and toward even
Sent for his shield: full meekly rose the maid,
Stript off the case, and gave the naked shield;
Then, when she heard his horse upon the stones,
Unclasping flung the casement back, and looked
Down on his helm, from which her sleeve had gone.
And Lancelot knew the little clinking sound;
And she by tact of love was well aware
That Lancelot knew that she was looking at him.
And yet he glanced not up, nor waved his hand,
Nor bad farewell, but sadly rode away.
This was the one discourtesy that he used.

So in her tower alone the maiden sat:
His very shield was gone; only the case,
Her own poor work, her empty labour, left.
But still she heard him, still his picture formed
And grew between her and the pictured wall.
Then came her father, saying in low tones,
'Have comfort,' whom she greeted quietly.
Then came her brethren saying, 'Peace to thee,
Sweet sister,' whom she answered with all calm.
But when they left her to herself again,
Death, like a friend's voice from a distant field
Approaching through the darkness, called; the owls
Wailing had power upon her, and she mixt
Her fancies with the sallow-rifted glooms
Of evening, and the moanings of the wind.

And in those days she made a little song,
And called her song 'The Song of Love and Death,'
And sang it: sweetly could she make and sing.

'Sweet is true love though given in vain, in vain;
And sweet is death who puts an end to pain:
I know not which is sweeter, no, not I.

'Love, art thou sweet? then bitter death must be:
Love, thou art bitter; sweet is death to me.
O Love, if death be sweeter, let me die.

'Sweet love, that seems not made to fade away,
Sweet death, that seems to make us loveless clay,
I know not which is sweeter, no, not I.

'I fain would follow love, if that could be;
I needs must follow death, who calls for me;
Call and I follow, I follow! let me die.'

High with the last line scaled her voice, and this,
All in a fiery dawning wild with wind

That shook her tower, the brothers heard, and thought
 With shuddering, 'Hark the Phantom of the house
 That ever shrieks before a death,' and called
 The father, and all three in hurry and fear
 Ran to her, and lo! the blood-red light of dawn
 Flared on her face, she shrilling, 'Let me die!'

As when we dwell upon a word we know,
 Repeating, till the word we know so well
 Becomes a wonder, and we know not why,
 So dwelt the father on her face, and thought
 'Is this Elaine?' till back the maiden fell,
 Then gave a languid hand to each, and lay,
 Speaking a still good-morrow with her eyes.
 At last she said, 'Sweet brothers, yesternight
 I seemed a curious little maid again,
 As happy as when we dwelt among the woods,
 And when ye used to take me with the flood
 Up the great river in the boatman's boat.
 Only ye would not pass beyond the cape
 That has the poplar on it: there ye fixt
 Your limit, oft returning with the tide.
 And yet I cried because ye would not pass
 Beyond it, and far up the shining flood
 Until we found the palace of the King.
 And yet ye would not; but this night I dreamed
 That I was all alone upon the flood,
 And then I said, "Now shall I have my will:"
 And there I woke, but still the wish remained.
 So let me hence that I may pass at last
 Beyond the poplar and far up the flood,
 Until I find the palace of the King.
 There will I enter in among them all,
 And no man there will dare to mock at me;
 But there the fine Gawain will wonder at me,
 And there the great Sir Lancelot muse at me;
 Gawain, who bad a thousand farewells to me,
 Lancelot, who coldly went, nor bad me one:
 And there the King will know me and my love,
 And there the Queen herself will pity me,
 And all the gentle court will welcome me,
 And after my long voyage I shall rest!'

'Peace,' said her father, 'O my child, ye seem
 Light-headed, for what force is yours to go
 So far, being sick? and wherefore would ye look
 On this proud fellow again, who scorns us all?'

Then the rough Torre began to heave and move,
 And bluster into stormy sobs and say,
 'I never loved him: an I meet with him,
 I care not howsoever great he be,
 Then will I strike at him and strike him down,
 Give me good fortune, I will strike him dead,
 For this discomfort he hath done the house.'

To whom the gentle sister made reply,
 'Fret not yourself, dear brother, nor be wroth,

Seeing it is no more Sir Lancelot's fault
Not to love me, than it is mine to love
Him of all men who seems to me the highest.'
'Highest?' the father answered, echoing 'highest?'
(He meant to break the passion in her) 'nay,
Daughter, I know not what you call the highest;
But this I know, for all the people know it,
He loves the Queen, and in an open shame:
And she returns his love in open shame;
If this be high, what is it to be low?'

Then spake the lily maid of Astolat:
'Sweet father, all too faint and sick am I
For anger: these are slanders: never yet
Was noble man but made ignoble talk.
He makes no friend who never made a foe.
But now it is my glory to have loved
One peerless, without stain: so let me pass,
My father, howsoever I seem to you,
Not all unhappy, having loved God's best
And greatest, though my love had no return:
Yet, seeing you desire your child to live,
Thanks, but you work against your own desire;
For if I could believe the things you say
I should but die the sooner; wherefore cease,
Sweet father, and bid call the ghostly man
Hither, and let me shrive me clean, and die.'

So when the ghostly man had come and gone,
She with a face, bright as for sin forgiven,
Besought Lavaine to write as she devised
A letter, word for word; and when he asked
'Is it for Lancelot, is it for my dear lord?
Then will I bear it gladly;' she replied,
'For Lancelot and the Queen and all the world,
But I myself must bear it.' Then he wrote
The letter she devised; which being writ
And folded, 'O sweet father, tender and true,
Deny me not,' she said—'ye never yet
Denied my fancies—this, however strange,
My latest: lay the letter in my hand
A little ere I die, and close the hand
Upon it; I shall guard it even in death.
And when the heat is gone from out my heart,
Then take the little bed on which I died
For Lancelot's love, and deck it like the Queen's
For richness, and me also like the Queen
In all I have of rich, and lay me on it.
And let there be prepared a chariot-bier
To take me to the river, and a barge
Be ready on the river, clothed in black.
I go in state to court, to meet the Queen.
There surely I shall speak for mine own self,
And none of you can speak for me so well.
And therefore let our dumb old man alone
Go with me, he can steer and row, and he

Will guide me to that palace, to the doors.'

She ceased: her father promised; whereupon
She grew so cheerful that they deemed her death
Was rather in the fantasy than the blood.
But ten slow mornings past, and on the eleventh
Her father laid the letter in her hand,
And closed the hand upon it, and she died.
So that day there was dole in Astolat.

But when the next sun brake from underground,
Then, those two brethren slowly with bent brows
Accompanying, the sad chariot-bier
Past like a shadow through the field, that shone
Full-summer, to that stream whereon the barge,
Palled all its length in blackest samite, lay.
There sat the lifelong creature of the house,
Loyal, the dumb old servitor, on deck,
Winking his eyes, and twisted all his face.
So those two brethren from the chariot took
And on the black decks laid her in her bed,
Set in her hand a lily, o'er her hung
The silken case with braided blazonings,
And kissed her quiet brows, and saying to her
'Sister, farewell for ever,' and again
'Farewell, sweet sister,' parted all in tears.
Then rose the dumb old servitor, and the dead,
Oared by the dumb, went upward with the flood—
In her right hand the lily, in her left
The letter—all her bright hair streaming down—
And all the coverlid was cloth of gold
Drawn to her waist, and she herself in white
All but her face, and that clear-featured face
Was lovely, for she did not seem as dead,
But fast asleep, and lay as though she smiled.

That day Sir Lancelot at the palace craved
Audience of Guinevere, to give at last,
The price of half a realm, his costly gift,
Hard-won and hardly won with bruise and blow,
With deaths of others, and almost his own,
The nine-years-fought-for diamonds: for he saw
One of her house, and sent him to the Queen
Bearing his wish, whereto the Queen agreed
With such and so unmoved a majesty
She might have seemed her statue, but that he,
Low-drooping till he wellnigh kissed her feet
For loyal awe, saw with a sidelong eye
The shadow of some piece of pointed lace,
In the Queen's shadow, vibrate on the walls,
And parted, laughing in his courtly heart.

All in an oriel on the summer side,
Vine-clad, of Arthur's palace toward the stream,
They met, and Lancelot kneeling uttered, 'Queen,
Lady, my liege, in whom I have my joy,
Take, what I had not won except for you,
These jewels, and make me happy, making them

An armlet for the roundest arm on earth,
Or necklace for a neck to which the swan's
Is tawnier than her cygnet's: these are words:
Your beauty is your beauty, and I sin
In speaking, yet O grant my worship of it
Words, as we grant grief tears. Such sin in words
Perchance, we both can pardon: but, my Queen,
I hear of rumours flying through your court.
Our bond, as not the bond of man and wife,
Should have in it an absolute trust
To make up that defect: let rumours be:
When did not rumours fly? these, as I trust
That you trust me in your own nobleness,
I may not well believe that you believe.'

While thus he spoke, half turned away, the Queen
Broke from the vast oriel-embowering vine
Leaf after leaf, and tore, and cast them off,
Till all the place whereon she stood was green;
Then, when he ceased, in one cold passive hand
Received at once and laid aside the gems
There on a table near her, and replied:

'It may be, I am quicker of belief
Than you believe me, Lancelot of the Lake.
Our bond is not the bond of man and wife.
This good is in it, whatsoe'er of ill,
It can be broken easier. I for you
This many a year have done despite and wrong
To one whom ever in my heart of hearts
I did acknowledge nobler. What are these?
Diamonds for me! they had been thrice their worth
Being your gift, had you not lost your own.
To loyal hearts the value of all gifts
Must vary as the giver's. Not for me!
For her! for your new fancy. Only this
Grant me, I pray you: have your joys apart.
I doubt not that however changed, you keep
So much of what is graceful: and myself
Would shun to break those bounds of courtesy
In which as Arthur's Queen I move and rule:
So cannot speak my mind. An end to this!
A strange one! yet I take it with Amen.
So pray you, add my diamonds to her pearls;
Deck her with these; tell her, she shines me down:
An armlet for an arm to which the Queen's
Is haggard, or a necklace for a neck
O as much fairer—as a faith once fair
Was richer than these diamonds—hers not mine—
Nay, by the mother of our Lord himself,
Or hers or mine, mine now to work my will—
She shall not have them.'

Saying which she seized,
And, through the casement standing wide for heat,
Flung them, and down they flashed, and smote the stream.
Then from the smitten surface flashed, as it were,

Diamonds to meet them, and they past away.
 Then while Sir Lancelot leant, in half disdain
 At love, life, all things, on the window ledge,
 Close underneath his eyes, and right across
 Where these had fallen, slowly past the barge.
 Whereon the lily maid of Astolat
 Lay smiling, like a star in blackest night.
 But the wild Queen, who saw not, burst away
 To weep and wail in secret; and the barge,
 On to the palace-doorway sliding, paused.
 There two stood armed, and kept the door; to whom,
 All up the marble stair, tier over tier,
 Were added mouths that gaped, and eyes that asked
 'What is it?' but that oarsman's haggard face,
 As hard and still as is the face that men
 Shape to their fancy's eye from broken rocks
 On some cliff-side, appalled them, and they said
 'He is enchanted, cannot speak—and she,
 Look how she sleeps—the Fairy Queen, so fair!
 Yea, but how pale! what are they? flesh and blood?
 Or come to take the King to Fairyland?
 For some do hold our Arthur cannot die,
 But that he passes into Fairyland.'

While thus they babbled of the King, the King
 Came girt with knights: then turned the tongueless man
 From the half-face to the full eye, and rose
 And pointed to the damsel, and the doors.
 So Arthur bad the meek Sir Percivale
 And pure Sir Galahad to uplift the maid;
 And reverently they bore her into hall.
 Then came the fine Gawain and wondered at her,
 And Lancelot later came and mused at her,
 And last the Queen herself, and pitied her:
 But Arthur spied the letter in her hand,
 Stoopt, took, brake seal, and read it; this was all:
 'Most noble lord, Sir Lancelot of the Lake,
 I, sometime called the maid of Astolat,
 Come, for you left me taking no farewell,
 Hither, to take my last farewell of you.
 I loved you, and my love had no return,
 And therefore my true love has been my death.
 And therefore to our Lady Guinevere,
 And to all other ladies, I make moan:
 Pray for my soul, and yield me burial.
 Pray for my soul thou too, Sir Lancelot,
 As thou art a knight peerless.'

Thus he read;
 And ever in the reading, lords and dames
 Wept, looking often from his face who read
 To hers which lay so silent, and at times,
 So touched were they, half-thinking that her lips,
 Who had devised the letter, moved again.
 Then freely spoke Sir Lancelot to them all:
 'My lord liege Arthur, and all ye that hear,

Know that for this most gentle maiden's death
Right heavy am I; for good she was and true,
But loved me with a love beyond all love
In women, whomsoever I have known.
Yet to be loved makes not to love again;
Not at my years, however it hold in youth.
I swear by truth and knighthood that I gave
No cause, not willingly, for such a love:
To this I call my friends in testimony,
Her brethren, and her father, who himself
Besought me to be plain and blunt, and use,
To break her passion, some discourtesy
Against my nature: what I could, I did.
I left her and I bad her no farewell;
Though, had I dreamt the damsel would have died,
I might have put my wits to some rough use,
And helped her from herself.'

Then said the Queen
(Sea was her wrath, yet working after storm)
'Ye might at least have done her so much grace,
Fair lord, as would have helped her from her death.'
He raised his head, their eyes met and hers fell,
He adding,
'Queen, she would not be content
Save that I wedded her, which could not be.
Then might she follow me through the world, she asked;
It could not be. I told her that her love
Was but the flash of youth, would darken down
To rise hereafter in a stiller flame
Toward one more worthy of her—then would I,
More specially were he, she wedded, poor,
Estate them with large land and territory
In mine own realm beyond the narrow seas,
To keep them in all joyance: more than this
I could not; this she would not, and she died.'

He pausing, Arthur answered, 'O my knight,
It will be to thy worship, as my knight,
And mine, as head of all our Table Round,
To see that she be buried worshipfully.'

So toward that shrine which then in all the realm
Was richest, Arthur leading, slowly went
The marshalled Order of their Table Round,
And Lancelot sad beyond his wont, to see
The maiden buried, not as one unknown,
Nor meanly, but with gorgeous obsequies,
And mass, and rolling music, like a queen.
And when the knights had laid her comely head
Low in the dust of half-forgotten kings,
Then Arthur spake among them, 'Let her tomb
Be costly, and her image thereupon,
And let the shield of Lancelot at her feet
Be carven, and her lily in her hand.
And let the story of her dolorous voyage
For all true hearts be blazoned on her tomb

In letters gold and azure!' which was wrought
 Thereafter; but when now the lords and dames
 And people, from the high door streaming, brake
 Disorderly, as homeward each, the Queen,
 Who marked Sir Lancelot where he moved apart,
 Drew near, and sighed in passing, 'Lancelot,
 Forgive me; mine was jealousy in love.'
 He answered with his eyes upon the ground,
 'That is love's curse; pass on, my Queen, forgiven.'
 But Arthur, who beheld his cloudy brows,
 Approached him, and with full affection said,
 'Lancelot, my Lancelot, thou in whom I have
 Most joy and most affiance, for I know
 What thou hast been in battle by my side,
 And many a time have watched thee at the tilt
 Strike down the lusty and long practised knight,
 And let the younger and unskilled go by
 To win his honour and to make his name,
 And loved thy courtesies and thee, a man
 Made to be loved; but now I would to God,
 Seeing the homeless trouble in thine eyes,
 Thou couldst have loved this maiden, shaped, it seems,
 By God for thee alone, and from her face,
 If one may judge the living by the dead,
 Delicately pure and marvellously fair,
 Who might have brought thee, now a lonely man
 Wifeless and heirless, noble issue, sons
 Born to the glory of thine name and fame,
 My knight, the great Sir Lancelot of the Lake.'

Then answered Lancelot, 'Fair she was, my King,
 Pure, as you ever wish your knights to be.
 To doubt her fairness were to want an eye,
 To doubt her pureness were to want a heart—
 Yea, to be loved, if what is worthy love
 Could bind him, but free love will not be bound.'

'Free love, so bound, were freest,' said the King.
 'Let love be free; free love is for the best:
 And, after heaven, on our dull side of death,
 What should be best, if not so pure a love
 Clothed in so pure a loveliness? yet thee
 She failed to bind, though being, as I think,
 Unbound as yet, and gentle, as I know.'

And Lancelot answered nothing, but he went,
 And at the inrunning of a little brook
 Sat by the river in a cove, and watched
 The high reed wave, and lifted up his eyes
 And saw the barge that brought her moving down,
 Far-off, a blot upon the stream, and said
 Low in himself, 'Ah simple heart and sweet,
 Ye loved me, damsel, surely with a love
 Far tenderer than my Queen's. Pray for thy soul?
 Ay, that will I. Farewell too—now at last—
 Farewell, fair lily. "Jealousy in love?"
 Not rather dead love's harsh heir, jealous pride?

Queen, if I grant the jealousy as of love,
May not your crescent fear for name and fame
Speak, as it waxes, of a love that wanes?
Why did the King dwell on my name to me?
Mine own name shames me, seeming a reproach,
Lancelot, whom the Lady of the Lake
Caught from his mother's arms—the wondrous one
Who passes through the vision of the night—
She chanted snatches of mysterious hymns
Heard on the winding waters, eve and morn
She kissed me saying, "Thou art fair, my child,
As a king's son," and often in her arms
She bare me, pacing on the dusky mere.
Would she had drowned me in it, where'er it be!
For what am I? what profits me my name
Of greatest knight? I fought for it, and have it:
Pleasure to have it, none; to lose it, pain;
Now grown a part of me: but what use in it?
To make men worse by making my sin known?
Or sin seem less, the sinner seeming great?
Alas for Arthur's greatest knight, a man
Not after Arthur's heart! I needs must break
These bonds that so defame me: not without
She wills it: would I, if she willed it? nay,
Who knows? but if I would not, then may God,
I pray him, send a sudden Angel down
To seize me by the hair and bear me far,
And fling me deep in that forgotten mere,
Among the tumbled fragments of the hills.'
So groaned Sir Lancelot in remorseful pain,
Not knowing he should die a holy man.

The Holy Grail

From noiseful arms, and acts of prowess done
In tournament or tilt, Sir Percivale,
Whom Arthur and his knighthood called The Pure,
Had passed into the silent life of prayer,
Praise, fast, and alms; and leaving for the cowl
The helmet in an abbey far away
From Camelot, there, and not long after, died.
And one, a fellow-monk among the rest,
Ambrosius, loved him much beyond the rest,
And honoured him, and wrought into his heart
A way by love that wakened love within,
To answer that which came: and as they sat
Beneath a world-old yew-tree, darkening half
The cloisters, on a gustful April morn
That puffed the swaying branches into smoke
Above them, ere the summer when he died
The monk Ambrosius questioned Percivale:
'O brother, I have seen this yew-tree smoke,
Spring after spring, for half a hundred years:
For never have I known the world without,
Nor ever strayed beyond the pale: but thee,

When first thou camest—such a courtesy
Spake through the limbs and in the voice—I knew
For one of those who eat in Arthur's hall;
For good ye are and bad, and like to coins,
Some true, some light, but every one of you
Stamped with the image of the King; and now
Tell me, what drove thee from the Table Round,
My brother? was it earthly passion crost?’

‘Nay,’ said the knight; ‘for no such passion mine.
But the sweet vision of the Holy Grail
Drove me from all vainglories, rivalries,
And earthly heats that spring and sparkle out
Among us in the jousts, while women watch
Who wins, who falls; and waste the spiritual strength
Within us, better offered up to Heaven.’

To whom the monk: ‘The Holy Grail!—I trust
We are green in Heaven's eyes; but here too much
We moulder—as to things without I mean—
Yet one of your own knights, a guest of ours,
Told us of this in our refectory,
But spake with such a sadness and so low
We heard not half of what he said. What is it?
The phantom of a cup that comes and goes?’

‘Nay, monk! what phantom?’ answered Percivale.
‘The cup, the cup itself, from which our Lord
Drank at the last sad supper with his own.
This, from the blessed land of Aromat—
After the day of darkness, when the dead
Went wandering o'er Moriah—the good saint
Arimathæan Joseph, journeying brought
To Glastonbury, where the winter thorn
Blossoms at Christmas, mindful of our Lord.
And there awhile it bode; and if a man
Could touch or see it, he was healed at once,
By faith, of all his ills. But then the times
Grew to such evil that the holy cup
Was caught away to Heaven, and disappeared.’

To whom the monk: ‘From our old books I know
That Joseph came of old to Glastonbury,
And there the heathen Prince, Arviragus,
Gave him an isle of marsh whereon to build;
And there he built with wattles from the marsh
A little lonely church in days of yore,
For so they say, these books of ours, but seem
Mute of this miracle, far as I have read.
But who first saw the holy thing today?’

‘A woman,’ answered Percivale, ‘a nun,
And one no further off in blood from me
Than sister; and if ever holy maid
With knees of adoration wore the stone,
A holy maid; though never maiden glowed,
But that was in her earlier maidenhood,
With such a fervent flame of human love,
Which being rudely blunted, glanced and shot

Only to holy things; to prayer and praise
She gave herself, to fast and alms. And yet,
Nun as she was, the scandal of the Court,
Sin against Arthur and the Table Round,
And the strange sound of an adulterous race,
Across the iron grating of her cell
Beat, and she prayed and fasted all the more.
'And he to whom she told her sins, or what
Her all but utter whiteness held for sin,
A man wellnigh a hundred winters old,
Spake often with her of the Holy Grail,
A legend handed down through five or six,
And each of these a hundred winters old,
From our Lord's time. And when King Arthur made
His Table Round, and all men's hearts became
Clean for a season, surely he had thought
That now the Holy Grail would come again;
But sin broke out. Ah, Christ, that it would come,
And heal the world of all their wickedness!
"O Father!" asked the maiden, "might it come
To me by prayer and fasting?" "Nay," said he,
"I know not, for thy heart is pure as snow."
And so she prayed and fasted, till the sun
Shone, and the wind blew, through her, and I thought
She might have risen and floated when I saw her.
'For on a day she sent to speak with me.
And when she came to speak, behold her eyes
Beyond my knowing of them, beautiful,
Beyond all knowing of them, wonderful,
Beautiful in the light of holiness.
And "O my brother Percivale," she said,
"Sweet brother, I have seen the Holy Grail:
For, waked at dead of night, I heard a sound
As of a silver horn from o'er the hills
Blown, and I thought, 'It is not Arthur's use
To hunt by moonlight;' and the slender sound
As from a distance beyond distance grew
Coming upon me—O never harp nor horn,
Nor aught we blow with breath, or touch with hand,
Was like that music as it came; and then
Streamed through my cell a cold and silver beam,
And down the long beam stole the Holy Grail,
Rose-red with beatings in it, as if alive,
Till all the white walls of my cell were dyed
With rosy colours leaping on the wall;
And then the music faded, and the Grail
Past, and the beam decayed, and from the walls
The rosy quiverings died into the night.
So now the Holy Thing is here again
Among us, brother, fast thou too and pray,
And tell thy brother knights to fast and pray,
That so perchance the vision may be seen
By thee and those, and all the world be healed."
'Then leaving the pale nun, I spake of this

To all men; and myself fasted and prayed
Always, and many among us many a week
Fasted and prayed even to the uttermost,
Expectant of the wonder that would be.

'And one there was among us, ever moved
Among us in white armour, Galahad.
"God make thee good as thou art beautiful,"
Said Arthur, when he dubbed him knight; and none,
In so young youth, was ever made a knight
Till Galahad; and this Galahad, when he heard
My sister's vision, filled me with amaze;
His eyes became so like her own, they seemed
Hers, and himself her brother more than I.

'Sister or brother none had he; but some
Called him a son of Lancelot, and some said
Begotten by enchantment—chatterers they,
Like birds of passage piping up and down,
That gape for flies—we know not whence they come;
For when was Lancelot wanderingly lewd?

'But she, the wan sweet maiden, shore away
Clean from her forehead all that wealth of hair
Which made a silken mat-work for her feet;
And out of this she plaited broad and long
A strong sword-belt, and wove with silver thread
And crimson in the belt a strange device,
A crimson grail within a silver beam;
And saw the bright boy-knight, and bound it on him,
Saying, "My knight, my love, my knight of heaven,
O thou, my love, whose love is one with mine,
I, maiden, round thee, maiden, bind my belt.
Go forth, for thou shalt see what I have seen,
And break through all, till one will crown thee king
Far in the spiritual city:" and as she spake
She sent the deathless passion in her eyes
Through him, and made him hers, and laid her mind
On him, and he believed in her belief.

'Then came a year of miracle: O brother,
In our great hall there stood a vacant chair,
Fashioned by Merlin ere he past away,
And carven with strange figures; and in and out
The figures, like a serpent, ran a scroll
Of letters in a tongue no man could read.
And Merlin called it "The Siege perilous,"
Perilous for good and ill; "for there," he said,
"No man could sit but he should lose himself:"
And once by misadventure Merlin sat
In his own chair, and so was lost; but he,
Galahad, when he heard of Merlin's doom,
Cried, "If I lose myself, I save myself!"

'Then on a summer night it came to pass,
While the great banquet lay along the hall,
That Galahad would sit down in Merlin's chair.

'And all at once, as there we sat, we heard
A cracking and a riving of the roofs,

And rending, and a blast, and overhead
Thunder, and in the thunder was a cry.
And in the blast there smote along the hall
A beam of light seven times more clear than day:
And down the long beam stole the Holy Grail
All over covered with a luminous cloud.
And none might see who bare it, and it past.
But every knight beheld his fellow's face
As in a glory, and all the knights arose,
And staring each at other like dumb men
Stood, till I found a voice and sware a vow.
'I sware a vow before them all, that I,
Because I had not seen the Grail, would ride
A twelvemonth and a day in quest of it,
Until I found and saw it, as the nun
My sister saw it; and Galahad sware the vow,
And good Sir Bors, our Lancelot's cousin, sware,
And Lancelot sware, and many among the knights,
And Gawain sware, and louder than the rest.'
Then spake the monk Ambrosius, asking him,
'What said the King? Did Arthur take the vow?'
'Nay, for my lord,' said Percivale, 'the King,
Was not in hall: for early that same day,
Scaped through a cavern from a bandit hold,
An outraged maiden sprang into the hall
Crying on help: for all her shining hair
Was smeared with earth, and either milky arm
Red-rent with hooks of bramble, and all she wore
Torn as a sail that leaves the rope is torn
In tempest: so the King arose and went
To smoke the scandalous hive of those wild bees
That made such honey in his realm. Howbeit
Some little of this marvel he too saw,
Returning o'er the plain that then began
To darken under Camelot; whence the King
Looked up, calling aloud, "Lo, there! the roofs
Of our great hall are rolled in thunder-smoke!
Pray Heaven, they be not smitten by the bolt."
For dear to Arthur was that hall of ours,
As having there so oft with all his knights
Feasted, and as the stateliest under heaven.
'O brother, had you known our mighty hall,
Which Merlin built for Arthur long ago!
For all the sacred mount of Camelot,
And all the dim rich city, roof by roof,
Tower after tower, spire beyond spire,
By grove, and garden-lawn, and rushing brook,
Climbs to the mighty hall that Merlin built.
And four great zones of sculpture, set betwixt
With many a mystic symbol, gird the hall:
And in the lowest beasts are slaying men,
And in the second men are slaying beasts,
And on the third are warriors, perfect men,
And on the fourth are men with growing wings,

And over all one statue in the mould
Of Arthur, made by Merlin, with a crown,
And peaked wings pointed to the Northern Star.
And eastward fronts the statue, and the crown
And both the wings are made of gold, and flame
At sunrise till the people in far fields,
Wasted so often by the heathen hordes,
Behold it, crying, "We have still a King."

'And, brother, had you known our hall within,
Broader and higher than any in all the lands!
Where twelve great windows blazon Arthur's wars,
And all the light that falls upon the board
Streams through the twelve great battles of our King.
Nay, one there is, and at the eastern end,
Wealthy with wandering lines of mount and mere,
Where Arthur finds the brand Excalibur.
And also one to the west, and counter to it,
And blank: and who shall blazon it? when and how?—
O there, perchance, when all our wars are done,
The brand Excalibur will be cast away.

'So to this hall full quickly rode the King,
In horror lest the work by Merlin wrought,
Dreamlike, should on the sudden vanish, wrapt
In unremorseful folds of rolling fire.
And in he rode, and up I glanced, and saw
The golden dragon sparkling over all:
And many of those who burnt the hold, their arms
Hacked, and their foreheads grimed with smoke, and seared,
Followed, and in among bright faces, ours,
Full of the vision, prest: and then the King
Spake to me, being nearest, "Percivale,"
(Because the hall was all in tumult—some
Vowing, and some protesting), "what is this?"

'O brother, when I told him what had chanced,
My sister's vision, and the rest, his face
Darkened, as I have seen it more than once,
When some brave deed seemed to be done in vain,
Darken; and "Woe is me, my knights," he cried,
"Had I been here, ye had not sworn the vow."
Bold was mine answer, "Had thyself been here,
My King, thou wouldst have sworn." "Yea, yea," said he,
"Art thou so bold and hast not seen the Grail?"

"Nay, lord, I heard the sound, I saw the light,
But since I did not see the Holy Thing,
I swear a vow to follow it till I saw."

'Then when he asked us, knight by knight, if any
Had seen it, all their answers were as one:
"Nay, lord, and therefore have we sworn our vows."

"Lo now," said Arthur, "have ye seen a cloud?
What go ye into the wilderness to see?"

'Then Galahad on the sudden, and in a voice
Shrilling along the hall to Arthur, called,
"But I, Sir Arthur, saw the Holy Grail,

I saw the Holy Grail and heard a cry—
'O Galahad, and O Galahad, follow me.'"
"Ah, Galahad, Galahad," said the King, "for such
As thou art is the vision, not for these.
Thy holy nun and thou have seen a sign—
Holier is none, my Percivale, than she—
A sign to maim this Order which I made.
But ye, that follow but the leader's bell"
(Brother, the King was hard upon his knights)
"Taliessin is our fullest throat of song,
And one hath sung and all the dumb will sing.
Lancelot is Lancelot, and hath overborne
Five knights at once, and every younger knight,
Unproven, holds himself as Lancelot,
Till overborne by one, he learns—and ye,
What are ye? Galahads?—no, nor Percivales"
(For thus it pleased the King to range me close
After Sir Galahad); "nay," said he, "but men
With strength and will to right the wronged, of power
To lay the sudden heads of violence flat,
Knights that in twelve great battles splashed and dyed
The strong White Horse in his own heathen blood—
But one hath seen, and all the blind will see.
Go, since your vows are sacred, being made:
Yet—for ye know the cries of all my realm
Pass through this hall—how often, O my knights,
Your places being vacant at my side,
This chance of noble deeds will come and go
Unchallenged, while ye follow wandering fires
Lost in the quagmire! Many of you, yea most,
Return no more: ye think I show myself
Too dark a prophet: come now, let us meet
The morrow morn once more in one full field
Of gracious pastime, that once more the King,
Before ye leave him for this Quest, may count
The yet-unbroken strength of all his knights,
Rejoicing in that Order which he made."
'So when the sun broke next from under ground,
All the great table of our Arthur closed
And clashed in such a tourney and so full,
So many lances broken—never yet
Had Camelot seen the like, since Arthur came;
And I myself and Galahad, for a strength
Was in us from this vision, overthrew
So many knights that all the people cried,
And almost burst the barriers in their heat,
Shouting, "Sir Galahad and Sir Percivale!"
'But when the next day brake from under ground—
O brother, had you known our Camelot,
Built by old kings, age after age, so old
The King himself had fears that it would fall,
So strange, and rich, and dim; for where the roofs
Tottered toward each other in the sky,
Met foreheads all along the street of those

Who watched us pass; and lower, and where the long
Rich galleries, lady-laden, weighed the necks
Of dragons clinging to the crazy walls,
Thicker than drops from thunder, showers of flowers
Fell as we past; and men and boys astride
On wyvern, lion, dragon, griffin, swan,
At all the corners, named us each by name,
Calling, "God speed!" but in the ways below
The knights and ladies wept, and rich and poor
Wept, and the King himself could hardly speak
For grief, and all in middle street the Queen,
Who rode by Lancelot, wailed and shrieked aloud,
"This madness has come on us for our sins."
So to the Gate of the three Queens we came,
Where Arthur's wars are rendered mystically,
And thence departed every one his way.

'And I was lifted up in heart, and thought
Of all my late-shown prowess in the lists,
How my strong lance had beaten down the knights,
So many and famous names; and never yet
Had heaven appeared so blue, nor earth so green,
For all my blood danced in me, and I knew
That I should light upon the Holy Grail.

'Thereafter, the dark warning of our King,
That most of us would follow wandering fires,
Came like a driving gloom across my mind.
Then every evil word I had spoken once,
And every evil thought I had thought of old,
And every evil deed I ever did,
Awoke and cried, "This Quest is not for thee."
And lifting up mine eyes, I found myself
Alone, and in a land of sand and thorns,
And I was thirsty even unto death;
And I, too, cried, "This Quest is not for thee."

'And on I rode, and when I thought my thirst
Would slay me, saw deep lawns, and then a brook,
With one sharp rapid, where the crisping white
Played ever back upon the sloping wave,
And took both ear and eye; and o'er the brook
Were apple-trees, and apples by the brook
Fallen, and on the lawns. "I will rest here,"
I said, "I am not worthy of the Quest;"
But even while I drank the brook, and ate
The goodly apples, all these things at once
Fell into dust, and I was left alone,
And thirsting, in a land of sand and thorns.

'And then behold a woman at a door
Spinning; and fair the house whereby she sat,
And kind the woman's eyes and innocent,
And all her bearing gracious; and she rose
Opening her arms to meet me, as who should say,
"Rest here;" but when I touched her, lo! she, too,
Fell into dust and nothing, and the house
Became no better than a broken shed,

And in it a dead babe; and also this
Fell into dust, and I was left alone.
'And on I rode, and greater was my thirst.
Then flashed a yellow gleam across the world,
And where it smote the plowshare in the field,
The plowman left his plowing, and fell down
Before it; where it glittered on her pail,
The milkmaid left her milking, and fell down
Before it, and I knew not why, but thought
"The sun is rising," though the sun had risen.
Then was I ware of one that on me moved
In golden armour with a crown of gold
About a casque all jewels; and his horse
In golden armour jewelled everywhere:
And on the splendour came, flashing me blind;
And seemed to me the Lord of all the world,
Being so huge. But when I thought he meant
To crush me, moving on me, lo! he, too,
Opened his arms to embrace me as he came,
And up I went and touched him, and he, too,
Fell into dust, and I was left alone
And wearying in a land of sand and thorns.

'And I rode on and found a mighty hill,
And on the top, a city walled: the spires
Pricked with incredible pinnacles into heaven.
And by the gateway stirred a crowd; and these
Cried to me climbing, "Welcome, Percivale!
Thou mightiest and thou purest among men!"
And glad was I and clomb, but found at top
No man, nor any voice. And thence I past
Far through a ruinous city, and I saw
That man had once dwelt there; but there I found
Only one man of an exceeding age.
"Where is that goodly company," said I,
"That so cried out upon me?" and he had
Scarce any voice to answer, and yet gasped,
"Whence and what art thou?" and even as he spoke
Fell into dust, and disappeared, and I
Was left alone once more, and cried in grief,
"Lo, if I find the Holy Grail itself
And touch it, it will crumble into dust."

'And thence I dropt into a lowly vale,
Low as the hill was high, and where the vale
Was lowest, found a chapel, and thereby
A holy hermit in a hermitage,
To whom I told my phantoms, and he said:
"O son, thou hast not true humility,
The highest virtue, mother of them all;
For when the Lord of all things made Himself
Naked of glory for His mortal change,
'Take thou my robe,' she said, 'for all is thine,'
And all her form shone forth with sudden light
So that the angels were amazed, and she
Followed Him down, and like a flying star

Led on the gray-haired wisdom of the east;
But her thou hast not known: for what is this
Thou thoughtest of thy prowess and thy sins?
Thou hast not lost thyself to save thyself
As Galahad." When the hermit made an end,
In silver armour suddenly Galahad shone
Before us, and against the chapel door
Laid lance, and entered, and we knelt in prayer.
And there the hermit slaked my burning thirst,
And at the sacring of the mass I saw
The holy elements alone; but he,
"Saw ye no more? I, Galahad, saw the Grail,
The Holy Grail, descend upon the shrine:
I saw the fiery face as of a child
That smote itself into the bread, and went;
And hither am I come; and never yet
Hath what thy sister taught me first to see,
This Holy Thing, failed from my side, nor come
Covered, but moving with me night and day,
Fainter by day, but always in the night
Blood-red, and sliding down the blackened marsh
Blood-red, and on the naked mountain top
Blood-red, and in the sleeping mere below
Blood-red. And in the strength of this I rode,
Shattering all evil customs everywhere,
And past through Pagan realms, and made them mine,
And clashed with Pagan hordes, and bore them down,
And broke through all, and in the strength of this
Come victor. But my time is hard at hand,
And hence I go; and one will crown me king
Far in the spiritual city; and come thou, too,
For thou shalt see the vision when I go."

'While thus he spake, his eye, dwelling on mine,
Drew me, with power upon me, till I grew
One with him, to believe as he believed.
Then, when the day began to wane, we went.

'There rose a hill that none but man could climb,
Scarred with a hundred wintry water-courses—
Storm at the top, and when we gained it, storm
Round us and death; for every moment glanced
His silver arms and gloomed: so quick and thick
The lightnings here and there to left and right
Struck, till the dry old trunks about us, dead,
Yea, rotten with a hundred years of death,
Sprang into fire: and at the base we found
On either hand, as far as eye could see,
A great black swamp and of an evil smell,
Part black, part whitened with the bones of men,
Not to be crost, save that some ancient king
Had built a way, where, linked with many a bridge,
A thousand piers ran into the great Sea.
And Galahad fled along them bridge by bridge,
And every bridge as quickly as he crost
Sprang into fire and vanished, though I yearned

To follow; and thrice above him all the heavens
Opened and blazed with thunder such as seemed
Shoutings of all the sons of God: and first
At once I saw him far on the great Sea,
In silver-shining armour starry-clear;
And o'er his head the Holy Vessel hung
Clothed in white samite or a luminous cloud.
And with exceeding swiftness ran the boat,
If boat it were—I saw not whence it came.
And when the heavens opened and blazed again
Roaring, I saw him like a silver star—
And had he set the sail, or had the boat
Become a living creature clad with wings?
And o'er his head the Holy Vessel hung
Redder than any rose, a joy to me,
For now I knew the veil had been withdrawn.
Then in a moment when they blazed again
Opening, I saw the least of little stars
Down on the waste, and straight beyond the star
I saw the spiritual city and all her spires
And gateways in a glory like one pearl—
No larger, though the goal of all the saints—
Strike from the sea; and from the star there shot
A rose-red sparkle to the city, and there
Dwelt, and I knew it was the Holy Grail,
Which never eyes on earth again shall see.
Then fell the floods of heaven drowning the deep.
And how my feet recrost the deathful ridge
No memory in me lives; but that I touched
The chapel-doors at dawn I know; and thence
Taking my war-horse from the holy man,
Glad that no phantom vexed me more, returned
To whence I came, the gate of Arthur's wars.'
'O brother,' asked Ambrosius,—'for in sooth
These ancient books—and they would win thee—teem,
Only I find not there this Holy Grail,
With miracles and marvels like to these,
Not all unlike; which oftentime I read,
Who read but on my breviary with ease,
Till my head swims; and then go forth and pass
Down to the little thorpe that lies so close,
And almost plastered like a martin's nest
To these old walls—and mingle with our folk;
And knowing every honest face of theirs
As well as ever shepherd knew his sheep,
And every homely secret in their hearts,
Delight myself with gossip and old wives,
And ills and aches, and teething, lyings-in,
And mirthful sayings, children of the place,
That have no meaning half a league away:
Or lulling random squabbles when they rise,
Chafferings and chatterings at the market-cross,
Rejoice, small man, in this small world of mine,
Yea, even in their hens and in their eggs—

O brother, saving this Sir Galahad,
Came ye on none but phantoms in your quest,
No man, no woman?’

Then Sir Percivale:

’All men, to one so bound by such a vow,
And women were as phantoms. O, my brother,
Why wilt thou shame me to confess to thee
How far I faltered from my quest and vow?
For after I had lain so many nights
A bedmate of the snail and eft and snake,
In grass and burdock, I was changed to wan
And meagre, and the vision had not come;
And then I chanced upon a goodly town
With one great dwelling in the middle of it;
Thither I made, and there was I disarmed
By maidens each as fair as any flower:
But when they led me into hall, behold,
The Princess of that castle was the one,
Brother, and that one only, who had ever
Made my heart leap; for when I moved of old
A slender page about her father’s hall,
And she a slender maiden, all my heart
Went after her with longing: yet we twain
Had never kissed a kiss, or vowed a vow.
And now I came upon her once again,
And one had wedded her, and he was dead,
And all his land and wealth and state were hers.
And while I tarried, every day she set
A banquet richer than the day before
By me; for all her longing and her will
Was toward me as of old; till one fair morn,
I walking to and fro beside a stream
That flashed across her orchard underneath
Her castle-walls, she stole upon my walk,
And calling me the greatest of all knights,
Embraced me, and so kissed me the first time,
And gave herself and all her wealth to me.
Then I remembered Arthur’s warning word,
That most of us would follow wandering fires,
And the Quest faded in my heart. Anon,
The heads of all her people drew to me,
With supplication both of knees and tongue:
”We have heard of thee: thou art our greatest knight,
Our Lady says it, and we well believe:
Wed thou our Lady, and rule over us,
And thou shalt be as Arthur in our land.”
O me, my brother! but one night my vow
Burnt me within, so that I rose and fled,
But wailed and wept, and hated mine own self,
And even the Holy Quest, and all but her;
Then after I was joined with Galahad
Cared not for her, nor anything upon earth.’
Then said the monk, ’Poor men, when yule is cold,
Must be content to sit by little fires.

And this am I, so that ye care for me
Ever so little; yea, and blest be Heaven
That brought thee here to this poor house of ours
Where all the brethren are so hard, to warm
My cold heart with a friend: but O the pity
To find thine own first love once more—to hold,
Hold her a wealthy bride within thine arms,
Or all but hold, and then—cast her aside,
Foregoing all her sweetness, like a weed.
For we that want the warmth of double life,
We that are plagued with dreams of something sweet
Beyond all sweetness in a life so rich,—
Ah, blessed Lord, I speak too earthlywise,
Seeing I never strayed beyond the cell,
But live like an old badger in his earth,
With earth about him everywhere, despite
All fast and penance. Saw ye none beside,
None of your knights?’

’Yea so,’ said Percivale:

’One night my pathway swerving east, I saw
The pelican on the casque of our Sir Bors
All in the middle of the rising moon:
And toward him spurred, and hailed him, and he me,
And each made joy of either; then he asked,
"Where is he? hast thou seen him—Lancelot?—Once,"
Said good Sir Bors, "he dashed across me—mad,
And maddening what he rode: and when I cried,
’Ridest thou then so hotly on a quest
So holy,’ Lancelot shouted, ’Stay me not!
I have been the sluggard, and I ride apace,
For now there is a lion in the way.’
So vanished."

’Then Sir Bors had ridden on
Softly, and sorrowing for our Lancelot,
Because his former madness, once the talk
And scandal of our table, had returned;
For Lancelot’s kith and kin so worship him
That ill to him is ill to them; to Bors
Beyond the rest: he well had been content
Not to have seen, so Lancelot might have seen,
The Holy Cup of healing; and, indeed,
Being so clouded with his grief and love,
Small heart was his after the Holy Quest:
If God would send the vision, well: if not,
The Quest and he were in the hands of Heaven.

’And then, with small adventure met, Sir Bors
Rode to the lonest tract of all the realm,
And found a people there among their crags,
Our race and blood, a remnant that were left
Paynim amid their circles, and the stones
They pitch up straight to heaven: and their wise men
Were strong in that old magic which can trace
The wandering of the stars, and scoffed at him
And this high Quest as at a simple thing:

Told him he followed—almost Arthur's words—
 A mocking fire: "what other fire than he,
 Whereby the blood beats, and the blossom blows,
 And the sea rolls, and all the world is warmed?"
 And when his answer chafed them, the rough crowd,
 Hearing he had a difference with their priests,
 Seized him, and bound and plunged him into a cell
 Of great piled stones; and lying bounden there
 In darkness through innumerable hours
 He heard the hollow-ringing heavens sweep
 Over him till by miracle—what else?—
 Heavy as it was, a great stone slipt and fell,
 Such as no wind could move: and through the gap
 Glimmered the streaming scud: then came a night
 Still as the day was loud; and through the gap
 The seven clear stars of Arthur's Table Round—
 For, brother, so one night, because they roll
 Through such a round in heaven, we named the stars,
 Rejoicing in ourselves and in our King—
 And these, like bright eyes of familiar friends,
 In on him shone: "And then to me, to me,"
 Said good Sir Bors, "beyond all hopes of mine,
 Who scarce had prayed or asked it for myself—
 Across the seven clear stars—O grace to me—
 In colour like the fingers of a hand
 Before a burning taper, the sweet Grail
 Glided and past, and close upon it pealed
 A sharp quick thunder." Afterwards, a maid,
 Who kept our holy faith among her kin
 In secret, entering, loosed and let him go.'

To whom the monk: 'And I remember now
 That pelican on the casque: Sir Bors it was
 Who spake so low and sadly at our board;
 And mighty reverent at our grace was he:
 A square-set man and honest; and his eyes,
 An out-door sign of all the warmth within,
 Smiled with his lips—a smile beneath a cloud,
 But heaven had meant it for a sunny one:
 Ay, ay, Sir Bors, who else? But when ye reached
 The city, found ye all your knights returned,
 Or was there sooth in Arthur's prophecy,
 Tell me, and what said each, and what the King?'

Then answered Percivale: 'And that can I,
 Brother, and truly; since the living words
 Of so great men as Lancelot and our King
 Pass not from door to door and out again,
 But sit within the house. O, when we reached
 The city, our horses stumbling as they trode
 On heaps of ruin, hornless unicorns,
 Cracked basilisks, and splintered cockatrices,
 And shattered talbots, which had left the stones
 Raw, that they fell from, brought us to the hall.
 'And there sat Arthur on the dais-throne,
 And those that had gone out upon the Quest,

Wasted and worn, and but a tithe of them,
And those that had not, stood before the King,
Who, when he saw me, rose, and bad me hail,
Saying, "A welfare in thine eye reproves
Our fear of some disastrous chance for thee
On hill, or plain, at sea, or flooding ford.
So fierce a gale made havoc here of late
Among the strange devices of our kings;
Yea, shook this newer, stronger hall of ours,
And from the statue Merlin moulded for us
Half-wrenched a golden wing; but now—the Quest,
This vision—hast thou seen the Holy Cup,
That Joseph brought of old to Glastonbury?"

'So when I told him all thyself hast heard,
Ambrosius, and my fresh but fixt resolve
To pass away into the quiet life,
He answered not, but, sharply turning, asked
Of Gawain, "Gawain, was this Quest for thee?"

"Nay, lord," said Gawain, "not for such as I.
Therefore I communed with a saintly man,
Who made me sure the Quest was not for me;
For I was much awearied of the Quest:
But found a silk pavilion in a field,
And merry maidens in it; and then this gale
Tore my pavilion from the tenting-pin,
And blew my merry maidens all about
With all discomfort; yea, and but for this,
My twelvemonth and a day were pleasant to me."

'He ceased; and Arthur turned to whom at first
He saw not, for Sir Bors, on entering, pushed
Athwart the throng to Lancelot, caught his hand,
Held it, and there, half-hidden by him, stood,
Until the King espied him, saying to him,
"Hail, Bors! if ever loyal man and true
Could see it, thou hast seen the Grail;" and Bors,
"Ask me not, for I may not speak of it:
I saw it;" and the tears were in his eyes.

'Then there remained but Lancelot, for the rest
Spake but of sundry perils in the storm;
Perhaps, like him of Cana in Holy Writ,
Our Arthur kept his best until the last;
"Thou, too, my Lancelot," asked the king, "my friend,
Our mightiest, hath this Quest availed for thee?"

"Our mightiest!" answered Lancelot, with a groan;
"O King!"—and when he paused, methought I spied
A dying fire of madness in his eyes—
"O King, my friend, if friend of thine I be,
Happier are those that welter in their sin,
Swine in the mud, that cannot see for slime,
Slime of the ditch: but in me lived a sin
So strange, of such a kind, that all of pure,
Noble, and knightly in me twined and clung
Round that one sin, until the wholesome flower
And poisonous grew together, each as each,

Not to be plucked asunder; and when thy knights
Sware, I sware with them only in the hope
That could I touch or see the Holy Grail
They might be plucked asunder. Then I spake
To one most holy saint, who wept and said,
That save they could be plucked asunder, all
My quest were but in vain; to whom I vowed
That I would work according as he willed.
And forth I went, and while I yearned and strove
To tear the twain asunder in my heart,
My madness came upon me as of old,
And whipt me into waste fields far away;
There was I beaten down by little men,
Mean knights, to whom the moving of my sword
And shadow of my spear had been enow
To scare them from me once; and then I came
All in my folly to the naked shore,
Wide flats, where nothing but coarse grasses grew;
But such a blast, my King, began to blow,
So loud a blast along the shore and sea,
Ye could not hear the waters for the blast,
Though heapt in mounds and ridges all the sea
Drove like a cataract, and all the sand
Swept like a river, and the clouded heavens
Were shaken with the motion and the sound.
And blackening in the sea-foam swayed a boat,
Half-swallowed in it, anchored with a chain;
And in my madness to myself I said,
'I will embark and I will lose myself,
And in the great sea wash away my sin.'
I burst the chain, I sprang into the boat.
Seven days I drove along the dreary deep,
And with me drove the moon and all the stars;
And the wind fell, and on the seventh night
I heard the shingle grinding in the surge,
And felt the boat shock earth, and looking up,
Behold, the enchanted towers of Carbonek,
A castle like a rock upon a rock,
With chasm-like portals open to the sea,
And steps that met the breaker! there was none
Stood near it but a lion on each side
That kept the entry, and the moon was full.
Then from the boat I leapt, and up the stairs.
There drew my sword. With sudden-flaring manes
Those two great beasts rose upright like a man,
Each gript a shoulder, and I stood between;
And, when I would have smitten them, heard a voice,
'Doubt not, go forward; if thou doubt, the beasts
Will tear thee piecemeal.' Then with violence
The sword was dashed from out my hand, and fell.
And up into the sounding hall I past;
But nothing in the sounding hall I saw,
No bench nor table, painting on the wall
Or shield of knight; only the rounded moon
Through the tall oriel on the rolling sea.

But always in the quiet house I heard,
Clear as a lark, high o'er me as a lark,
A sweet voice singing in the topmost tower
To the eastward: up I climbed a thousand steps
With pain: as in a dream I seemed to climb
For ever: at the last I reached a door,
A light was in the crannies, and I heard,
'Glory and joy and honour to our Lord
And to the Holy Vessel of the Grail.'
Then in my madness I essayed the door;
It gave; and through a stormy glare, a heat
As from a seventimes-heated furnace, I,
Blasted and burnt, and blinded as I was,
With such a fierceness that I swooned away—
O, yet methought I saw the Holy Grail,
All palled in crimson samite, and around
Great angels, awful shapes, and wings and eyes.
And but for all my madness and my sin,
And then my swooning, I had sworn I saw
That which I saw; but what I saw was veiled
And covered; and this Quest was not for me."

'So speaking, and here ceasing, Lancelot left
The hall long silent, till Sir Gawain—nay,
Brother, I need not tell thee foolish words,—
A reckless and irreverent knight was he,
Now boldened by the silence of his King,—
Well, I will tell thee: "O King, my liege," he said,
"Hath Gawain failed in any quest of thine?
When have I stinted stroke in foughten field?
But as for thine, my good friend Percivale,
Thy holy nun and thou have driven men mad,
Yea, made our mightiest madder than our least.
But by mine eyes and by mine ears I swear,
I will be deafer than the blue-eyed cat,
And thrice as blind as any noonday owl,
To holy virgins in their ecstasies,
Henceforward."

"Deafer," said the blameless King,
"Gawain, and blinder unto holy things
Hope not to make thyself by idle vows,
Being too blind to have desire to see.
But if indeed there came a sign from heaven,
Blessed are Bors, Lancelot and Percivale,
For these have seen according to their sight.
For every fiery prophet in old times,
And all the sacred madness of the bard,
When God made music through them, could but speak
His music by the framework and the chord;
And as ye saw it ye have spoken truth.

"Nay—but thou errest, Lancelot: never yet
Could all of true and noble in knight and man
Twine round one sin, whatever it might be,
With such a closeness, but apart there grew,
Save that he were the swine thou spakest of,

Some root of knighthood and pure nobleness;
 Where to see thou, that it may bear its flower.
 "And spake I not too truly, O my knights?
 Was I too dark a prophet when I said
 To those who went upon the Holy Quest,
 That most of them would follow wandering fires,
 Lost in the quagmire?—lost to me and gone,
 And left me gazing at a barren board,
 And a lean Order—scarce returned a tithe—
 And out of those to whom the vision came
 My greatest hardly will believe he saw;
 Another hath beheld it afar off,
 And leaving human wrongs to right themselves,
 Cares but to pass into the silent life.
 And one hath had the vision face to face,
 And now his chair desires him here in vain,
 However they may crown him elsewhere.
 "And some among you held, that if the King
 Had seen the sight he would have sworn the vow:
 Not easily, seeing that the King must guard
 That which he rules, and is but as the hind
 To whom a space of land is given to plow.
 Who may not wander from the allotted field
 Before his work be done; but, being done,
 Let visions of the night or of the day
 Come, as they will; and many a time they come,
 Until this earth he walks on seems not earth,
 This light that strikes his eyeball is not light,
 This air that smites his forehead is not air
 But vision—yea, his very hand and foot—
 In moments when he feels he cannot die,
 And knows himself no vision to himself,
 Nor the high God a vision, nor that One
 Who rose again: ye have seen what ye have seen."
 'So spake the King: I knew not all he meant.'

Pelleas and Ettarre

King Arthur made new knights to fill the gap
 Left by the Holy Quest; and as he sat
 In hall at old Caerleon, the high doors
 Were softly sundered, and through these a youth,
 Pelleas, and the sweet smell of the fields
 Past, and the sunshine came along with him.
 'Make me thy knight, because I know, Sir King,
 All that belongs to knighthood, and I love.'
 Such was his cry: for having heard the King
 Had let proclaim a tournament—the prize
 A golden circlet and a knightly sword,
 Full fain had Pelleas for his lady won
 The golden circlet, for himself the sword:
 And there were those who knew him near the King,
 And promised for him: and Arthur made him knight.
 And this new knight, Sir Pelleas of the isles—
 But lately come to his inheritance,

And lord of many a barren isle was he—
Riding at noon, a day or twain before,
Across the forest called of Dean, to find
Caerleon and the King, had felt the sun
Beat like a strong knight on his helm, and reeled
Almost to falling from his horse; but saw
Near him a mound of even-sloping side,
Whereon a hundred stately beeches grew,
And here and there great hollies under them;
But for a mile all round was open space,
And fern and heath: and slowly Pelleas drew
To that dim day, then binding his good horse
To a tree, cast himself down; and as he lay
At random looking over the brown earth
Through that green-glooming twilight of the grove,
It seemed to Pelleas that the fern without
Burnt as a living fire of emeralds,
So that his eyes were dazzled looking at it.
Then o'er it crost the dimness of a cloud
Floating, and once the shadow of a bird
Flying, and then a fawn; and his eyes closed.
And since he loved all maidens, but no maid
In special, half-awake he whispered, 'Where?
O where? I love thee, though I know thee not.
For fair thou art and pure as Guinevere,
And I will make thee with my spear and sword
As famous—O my Queen, my Guinevere,
For I will be thine Arthur when we meet.'

Suddenly wakened with a sound of talk
And laughter at the limit of the wood,
And glancing through the hoary boles, he saw,
Strange as to some old prophet might have seemed
A vision hovering on a sea of fire,
Damsels in divers colours like the cloud
Of sunset and sunrise, and all of them
On horses, and the horses richly trapt
Breast-high in that bright line of bracken stood:
And all the damsels talked confusedly,
And one was pointing this way, and one that,
Because the way was lost.

And Pelleas rose,
And loosed his horse, and led him to the light.
There she that seemed the chief among them said,
'In happy time behold our pilot-star!
Youth, we are damsels-errant, and we ride,
Armed as ye see, to tilt against the knights
There at Caerleon, but have lost our way:
To right? to left? straight forward? back again?
Which? tell us quickly.'

Pelleas gazing thought,
'Is Guinevere herself so beautiful?'
For large her violet eyes looked, and her bloom
A rosy dawn kindled in stainless heavens,
And round her limbs, mature in womanhood;

And slender was her hand and small her shape;
And but for those large eyes, the haunts of scorn,
She might have seemed a toy to trifle with,
And pass and care no more. But while he gazed
The beauty of her flesh abashed the boy,
As though it were the beauty of her soul:
For as the base man, judging of the good,
Puts his own baseness in him by default
Of will and nature, so did Pelleas lend
All the young beauty of his own soul to hers,
Believing her; and when she spake to him,
Stammered, and could not make her a reply.
For out of the waste islands had he come,
Where saving his own sisters he had known
Scarce any but the women of his isles,
Rough wives, that laughed and screamed against the gulls,
Makers of nets, and living from the sea.

Then with a slow smile turned the lady round
And looked upon her people; and as when
A stone is flung into some sleeping tarn,
The circle widens till it lip the marge,
Spread the slow smile through all her company.
Three knights were thereamong; and they too smiled,
Scorning him; for the lady was Ettarre,
And she was a great lady in her land.

Again she said, 'O wild and of the woods,
Knowest thou not the fashion of our speech?
Or have the Heavens but given thee a fair face,
Lacking a tongue?'

'O damsel,' answered he,
'I woke from dreams; and coming out of gloom
Was dazzled by the sudden light, and crave
Pardon: but will ye to Caerleon? I
Go likewise: shall I lead you to the King?'

'Lead then,' she said; and through the woods they went.
And while they rode, the meaning in his eyes,
His tenderness of manner, and chaste awe,
His broken utterances and bashfulness,
Were all a burthen to her, and in her heart
She muttered, 'I have lighted on a fool,
Raw, yet so stale!' But since her mind was bent
On hearing, after trumpet blown, her name
And title, 'Queen of Beauty,' in the lists
Cried—and beholding him so strong, she thought
That peradventure he will fight for me,
And win the circlet: therefore flattered him,
Being so gracious, that he wellnigh deemed
His wish by hers was echoed; and her knights
And all her damsels too were gracious to him,
For she was a great lady.

And when they reached
Caerleon, ere they past to lodging, she,
Taking his hand, 'O the strong hand,' she said,
'See! look at mine! but wilt thou fight for me,

And win me this fine circlet, Pelleas,
That I may love thee?’
Then his helpless heart
Leapt, and he cried, ‘Ay! wilt thou if I win?’
‘Ay, that will I,’ she answered, and she laughed,
And straitly nipt the hand, and flung it from her;
Then glanced askew at those three knights of hers,
Till all her ladies laughed along with her.

‘O happy world,’ thought Pelleas, ‘all, meseems,
Are happy; I the happiest of them all.’
Nor slept that night for pleasure in his blood,
And green wood-ways, and eyes among the leaves;
Then being on the morrow knighted, sware
To love one only. And as he came away,
The men who met him rounded on their heels
And wondered after him, because his face
Shone like the countenance of a priest of old
Against the flame about a sacrifice
Kindled by fire from heaven: so glad was he.

Then Arthur made vast banquets, and strange knights
From the four winds came in: and each one sat,
Though served with choice from air, land, stream, and sea,
Oft in mid-banquet measuring with his eyes
His neighbour’s make and might: and Pelleas looked
Noble among the noble, for he dreamed
His lady loved him, and he knew himself
Loved of the King: and him his new-made knight
Worshipt, whose lightest whisper moved him more
Than all the ranged reasons of the world.

Then blushed and brake the morning of the jousts,
And this was called ‘The Tournament of Youth:’
For Arthur, loving his young knight, withheld
His older and his mightier from the lists,
That Pelleas might obtain his lady’s love,
According to her promise, and remain
Lord of the tourney. And Arthur had the jousts
Down in the flat field by the shore of Usk
Holden: the gilded parapets were crowned
With faces, and the great tower filled with eyes
Up to the summit, and the trumpets blew.
There all day long Sir Pelleas kept the field
With honour: so by that strong hand of his
The sword and golden circlet were achieved.

Then rang the shout his lady loved: the heat
Of pride and glory fired her face; her eye
Sparkled; she caught the circlet from his lance,
And there before the people crowned herself:
So for the last time she was gracious to him.

Then at Caerleon for a space—her look
Bright for all others, cloudier on her knight—
Lingered Ettarre: and seeing Pelleas droop,
Said Guinevere, ‘We marvel at thee much,
O damsel, wearing this unsunny face

To him who won thee glory!' And she said,
'Had ye not held your Lancelot in your bower,
My Queen, he had not won.' Whereat the Queen,
As one whose foot is bitten by an ant,
Glanced down upon her, turned and went her way.
But after, when her damsels, and herself,
And those three knights all set their faces home,
Sir Pelleas followed. She that saw him cried,
'Damsels—and yet I should be shamed to say it—
I cannot bide Sir Baby. Keep him back
Among yourselves. Would rather that we had
Some rough old knight who knew the worldly way,
Albeit grizzlier than a bear, to ride
And jest with: take him to you, keep him off,
And pamper him with papmeat, if ye will,
Old milky fables of the wolf and sheep,
Such as the wholesome mothers tell their boys.
Nay, should ye try him with a merry one
To find his mettle, good: and if he fly us,
Small matter! let him.' This her damsels heard,
And mindful of her small and cruel hand,
They, closing round him through the journey home,
Acted her hest, and always from her side
Restrained him with all manner of device,
So that he could not come to speech with her.
And when she gained her castle, upsprang the bridge,
Down rang the grate of iron through the groove,
And he was left alone in open field.
'These be the ways of ladies,' Pelleas thought,
'To those who love them, trials of our faith.
Yea, let her prove me to the uttermost,
For loyal to the uttermost am I.'
So made his moan; and darkness falling, sought
A priory not far off, there lodged, but rose
With morning every day, and, moist or dry,
Full-armed upon his charger all day long
Sat by the walls, and no one opened to him.
And this persistence turned her scorn to wrath.
Then calling her three knights, she charged them, 'Out!
And drive him from the walls.' And out they came
But Pelleas overthrew them as they dashed
Against him one by one; and these returned,
But still he kept his watch beneath the wall.
Thereon her wrath became a hate; and once,
A week beyond, while walking on the walls
With her three knights, she pointed downward, 'Look,
He haunts me—I cannot breathe—besieges me;
Down! strike him! put my hate into your strokes,
And drive him from my walls.' And down they went,
And Pelleas overthrew them one by one;
And from the tower above him cried Ettarre,
'Bind him, and bring him in.'
He heard her voice;
Then let the strong hand, which had overthrown

Her minion-knights, by those he overthrew
Be bounden straight, and so they brought him in.
Then when he came before Ettarre, the sight
Of her rich beauty made him at one glance
More bondsman in his heart than in his bonds.
Yet with good cheer he spake, 'Behold me, Lady,
A prisoner, and the vassal of thy will;
And if thou keep me in thy donjon here,
Content am I so that I see thy face
But once a day: for I have sworn my vows,
And thou hast given thy promise, and I know
That all these pains are trials of my faith,
And that thyself, when thou hast seen me strained
And sifted to the utmost, wilt at length
Yield me thy love and know me for thy knight.'
Then she began to rail so bitterly,
With all her damsels, he was stricken mute;
But when she mocked his vows and the great King,
Lighted on words: 'For pity of thine own self,
Peace, Lady, peace: is he not thine and mine?'
'Thou fool,' she said, 'I never heard his voice
But longed to break away. Unbind him now,
And thrust him out of doors; for save he be
Fool to the midmost marrow of his bones,
He will return no more.' And those, her three,
Laughed, and unbound, and thrust him from the gate.
And after this, a week beyond, again
She called them, saying, 'There he watches yet,
There like a dog before his master's door!
Kicked, he returns: do ye not hate him, ye?
Ye know yourselves: how can ye bide at peace,
Affronted with his fulsome innocence?
Are ye but creatures of the board and bed,
No men to strike? Fall on him all at once,
And if ye slay him I reckon not: if ye fail,
Give ye the slave mine order to be bound,
Bind him as heretofore, and bring him in:
It may be ye shall slay him in his bonds.'
She spake; and at her will they couched their spears,
Three against one: and Gawain passing by,
Bound upon solitary adventure, saw
Low down beneath the shadow of those towers
A villainy, three to one: and through his heart
The fire of honour and all noble deeds
Flashed, and he called, 'I strike upon thy side—
The caitiffs!' 'Nay,' said Pelleas, 'but forbear;
He needs no aid who doth his lady's will.'
So Gawain, looking at the villainy done,
Forbore, but in his heat and eagerness
Trembled and quivered, as the dog, withheld
A moment from the vermin that he sees
Before him, shivers, ere he springs and kills.
And Pelleas overthrew them, one to three;
And they rose up, and bound, and brought him in.

Then first her anger, leaving Pelleas, burned
 Full on her knights in many an evil name
 Of craven, weakling, and thrice-beaten hound:
 'Yet, take him, ye that scarce are fit to touch,
 Far less to bind, your victor, and thrust him out,
 And let who will release him from his bonds.
 And if he comes again'—there she brake short;
 And Pelleas answered, 'Lady, for indeed
 I loved you and I deemed you beautiful,
 I cannot brook to see your beauty marred
 Through evil spite: and if ye love me not,
 I cannot bear to dream you so forsworn:
 I had liefer ye were worthy of my love,
 Than to be loved again of you—farewell;
 And though ye kill my hope, not yet my love,
 Vex not yourself: ye will not see me more.'

While thus he spake, she gazed upon the man
 Of princely bearing, though in bonds, and thought,
 'Why have I pushed him from me? this man loves,
 If love there be: yet him I loved not. Why?
 I deemed him fool? yea, so? or that in him
 A something—was it nobler than myself?
 Seemed my reproach? He is not of my kind.
 He could not love me, did he know me well.
 Nay, let him go—and quickly.' And her knights
 Laughed not, but thrust him bounden out of door.

Forth sprang Gawain, and loosed him from his bonds,
 And flung them o'er the walls; and afterward,
 Shaking his hands, as from a lazar's rag,
 'Faith of my body,' he said, 'and art thou not—
 Yea thou art he, whom late our Arthur made
 Knight of his table; yea and he that won
 The circlet? wherefore hast thou so defamed
 Thy brotherhood in me and all the rest,
 As let these caitiffs on thee work their will?'

And Pelleas answered, 'O, their wills are hers
 For whom I won the circlet; and mine, hers,
 Thus to be bounden, so to see her face,
 Marred though it be with spite and mockery now,
 Other than when I found her in the woods;
 And though she hath me bounden but in spite,
 And all to flout me, when they bring me in,
 Let me be bounden, I shall see her face;
 Else must I die through mine unhappiness.'

And Gawain answered kindly though in scorn,
 'Why, let my lady bind me if she will,
 And let my lady beat me if she will:
 But an she send her delegate to thrall
 These fighting hands of mine—Christ kill me then
 But I will slice him handless by the wrist,
 And let my lady sear the stump for him,
 Howl as he may. But hold me for your friend:
 Come, ye know nothing: here I pledge my troth,
 Yea, by the honour of the Table Round,

I will be leal to thee and work thy work,
And tame thy jailing princess to thine hand.
Lend me thine horse and arms, and I will say
That I have slain thee. She will let me in
To hear the manner of thy fight and fall;
Then, when I come within her counsels, then
From prime to vespers will I chant thy praise
As prowtest knight and truest lover, more
Than any have sung thee living, till she long
To have thee back in lusty life again,
Not to be bound, save by white bonds and warm,
Dearer than freedom. Wherefore now thy horse
And armour: let me go: be comforted:
Give me three days to melt her fancy, and hope
The third night hence will bring thee news of gold.'

Then Pelleas lent his horse and all his arms,
Saving the goodly sword, his prize, and took
Gawain's, and said, 'Betray me not, but help—
Art thou not he whom men call light-of-love?'

'Ay,' said Gawain, 'for women be so light.'
Then bounded forward to the castle walls,
And raised a bugle hanging from his neck,
And winded it, and that so musically
That all the old echoes hidden in the wall
Rang out like hollow woods at hunting-tide.

Up ran a score of damsels to the tower;
'Avaunt,' they cried, 'our lady loves thee not.'
But Gawain lifting up his vizor said,
'Gawain am I, Gawain of Arthur's court,
And I have slain this Pelleas whom ye hate:
Behold his horse and armour. Open gates,
And I will make you merry.'

And down they ran,
Her damsels, crying to their lady, 'Lo!
Pelleas is dead—he told us—he that hath
His horse and armour: will ye let him in?
He slew him! Gawain, Gawain of the court,
Sir Gawain—there he waits below the wall,
Blowing his bugle as who should say him nay.'

And so, leave given, straight on through open door
Rode Gawain, whom she greeted courteously.
'Dead, is it so?' she asked. 'Ay, ay,' said he,
'And oft in dying cried upon your name.'
'Pity on him,' she answered, 'a good knight,
But never let me bide one hour at peace.'
'Ay,' thought Gawain, 'and you be fair enow:
But I to your dead man have given my troth,
That whom ye loathe, him will I make you love.'

So those three days, aimless about the land,
Lost in a doubt, Pelleas wandering
Waited, until the third night brought a moon
With promise of large light on woods and ways.

Hot was the night and silent; but a sound
 Of Gawain ever coming, and this lay—
 Which Pelleas had heard sung before the Queen,
 And seen her sadden listening—vext his heart,
 And marred his rest—'A worm within the rose.'

'A rose, but one, none other rose had I,
 A rose, one rose, and this was wondrous fair,
 One rose, a rose that gladdened earth and sky,
 One rose, my rose, that sweetened all mine air—
 I cared not for the thorns; the thorns were there.

'One rose, a rose to gather by and by,
 One rose, a rose, to gather and to wear,
 No rose but one—what other rose had I?
 One rose, my rose; a rose that will not die,—
 He dies who loves it,—if the worm be there.'

This tender rhyme, and evermore the doubt,
 'Why lingers Gawain with his golden news?'
 So shook him that he could not rest, but rode
 Ere midnight to her walls, and bound his horse
 Hard by the gates. Wide open were the gates,
 And no watch kept; and in through these he past,
 And heard but his own steps, and his own heart
 Beating, for nothing moved but his own self,
 And his own shadow. Then he crost the court,
 And spied not any light in hall or bower,
 But saw the postern portal also wide
 Yawning; and up a slope of garden, all
 Of roses white and red, and brambles mixt
 And overgrowing them, went on, and found,
 Here too, all hushed below the mellow moon,
 Save that one rivulet from a tiny cave
 Came lightening downward, and so spilt itself
 Among the roses, and was lost again.

Then was he ware of three pavilions reared
 Above the bushes, gilden-peakt: in one,
 Red after revel, droned her lurdane knights
 Slumbering, and their three squires across their feet:
 In one, their malice on the placid lip
 Frozen by sweet sleep, four of her damsels lay:
 And in the third, the circlet of the jousts
 Bound on her brow, were Gawain and Ettarre.

Back, as a hand that pushes through the leaf
 To find a nest and feels a snake, he drew:
 Back, as a coward slinks from what he fears
 To cope with, or a traitor proven, or hound
 Beaten, did Pelleas in an utter shame
 Creep with his shadow through the court again,
 Fingering at his sword-handle until he stood
 There on the castle-bridge once more, and thought,
 'I will go back, and slay them where they lie.'

And so went back, and seeing them yet in sleep
 Said, 'Ye, that so dishallow the holy sleep,
 Your sleep is death,' and drew the sword, and thought,

'What! slay a sleeping knight? the King hath bound
And sworn me to this brotherhood;' again,
'Alas that ever a knight should be so false.'
Then turned, and so returned, and groaning laid
The naked sword athwart their naked throats,
There left it, and them sleeping; and she lay,
The circlet of her tourney round her brows,
And the sword of the tourney across her throat.

And forth he past, and mounting on his horse
Stared at her towers that, larger than themselves
In their own darkness, thronged into the moon.
Then crushed the saddle with his thighs, and clenched
His hands, and maddened with himself and moaned:

'Would they have risen against me in their blood
At the last day? I might have answered them
Even before high God. O towers so strong,
Huge, solid, would that even while I gaze
The crack of earthquake shivering to your base
Split you, and Hell burst up your harlot roofs
Bellowing, and charred you through and through within,
Black as the harlot's heart—hollow as a skull!
Let the fierce east scream through your eyelet-holes,
And whirl the dust of harlots round and round
In dung and nettles! hiss, snake—I saw him there—
Let the fox bark, let the wolf yell. Who yells
Here in the still sweet summer night, but I—
I, the poor Pelleas whom she called her fool?
Fool, beast—he, she, or I? myself most fool;
Beast too, as lacking human wit—disgraced,
Dishonoured all for trial of true love—
Love?—we be all alike: only the King
Hath made us fools and liars. O noble vows!
O great and sane and simple race of brutes
That own no lust because they have no law!
For why should I have loved her to my shame?
I loathe her, as I loved her to my shame.
I never loved her, I but lusted for her—
Away—'
He dashed the rowel into his horse,
And bounded forth and vanished through the night.

Then she, that felt the cold touch on her throat,
Awaking knew the sword, and turned herself
To Gawain: 'Liar, for thou hast not slain
This Pelleas! here he stood, and might have slain
Me and thyself.' And he that tells the tale
Says that her ever-veering fancy turned
To Pelleas, as the one true knight on earth,
And only lover; and through her love her life
Wasted and pined, desiring him in vain.

But he by wild and way, for half the night,
And over hard and soft, striking the sod
From out the soft, the spark from off the hard,
Rode till the star above the wakening sun,
Beside that tower where Percivale was cowed,

Glanced from the rosy forehead of the dawn.
For so the words were flashed into his heart
He knew not whence or wherefore: 'O sweet star,
Pure on the virgin forehead of the dawn!'
And there he would have wept, but felt his eyes
Harder and drier than a fountain bed
In summer: thither came the village girls
And lingered talking, and they come no more
Till the sweet heavens have filled it from the heights
Again with living waters in the change
Of seasons: hard his eyes; harder his heart
Seemed; but so weary were his limbs, that he,
Gasping, 'Of Arthur's hall am I, but here,
Here let me rest and die,' cast himself down,
And gulfed his griefs in inmost sleep; so lay,
Till shaken by a dream, that Gawain fired
The hall of Merlin, and the morning star
Reeled in the smoke, brake into flame, and fell.

He woke, and being ware of some one nigh,
Sent hands upon him, as to tear him, crying,
'False! and I held thee pure as Guinevere.'

But Percivale stood near him and replied,
'Am I but false as Guinevere is pure?
Or art thou mazed with dreams? or being one
Of our free-spoken Table hast not heard
That Lancelot'—there he checked himself and paused.

Then fared it with Sir Pelleas as with one
Who gets a wound in battle, and the sword
That made it plunges through the wound again,
And pricks it deeper: and he shrank and wailed,
'Is the Queen false?' and Percivale was mute.
'Have any of our Round Table held their vows?'
And Percivale made answer not a word.
'Is the King true?' 'The King!' said Percivale.
'Why then let men couple at once with wolves.
What! art thou mad?'

But Pelleas, leaping up,
Ran through the doors and vaulted on his horse
And fled: small pity upon his horse had he,
Or on himself, or any, and when he met
A cripple, one that held a hand for alms—
Hunched as he was, and like an old dwarf-elm
That turns its back upon the salt blast, the boy
Paused not, but overrode him, shouting, 'False,
And false with Gawain!' and so left him bruised
And battered, and fled on, and hill and wood
Went ever streaming by him till the gloom,
That follows on the turning of the world,
Darkened the common path: he twitched the reins,
And made his beast that better knew it, swerve
Now off it and now on; but when he saw
High up in heaven the hall that Merlin built,
Blackening against the dead-green stripes of even,
'Black nest of rats,' he groaned, 'ye build too high.'

Not long thereafter from the city gates
Issued Sir Lancelot riding airily,
Warm with a gracious parting from the Queen,
Peace at his heart, and gazing at a star
And marvelling what it was: on whom the boy,
Across the silent seeded meadow-grass
Borne, clashed: and Lancelot, saying, 'What name hast thou
That ridest here so blindly and so hard?'
'No name, no name,' he shouted, 'a scourge am I
To lash the treasons of the Table Round.'
'Yea, but thy name?' 'I have many names,' he cried:
'I am wrath and shame and hate and evil fame,
And like a poisonous wind I pass to blast
And blaze the crime of Lancelot and the Queen.'
'First over me,' said Lancelot, 'shalt thou pass.'
'Fight therefore,' yelled the youth, and either knight
Drew back a space, and when they closed, at once
The weary steed of Pelleas floundering flung
His rider, who called out from the dark field,
'Thou art as false as Hell: slay me: I have no sword.'
Then Lancelot, 'Yea, between thy lips—and sharp;
But here I will disedge it by thy death.'
'Slay then,' he shrieked, 'my will is to be slain,'
And Lancelot, with his heel upon the fallen,
Rolling his eyes, a moment stood, then spake:
'Rise, weakling; I am Lancelot; say thy say.'
And Lancelot slowly rode his warhorse back
To Camelot, and Sir Pelleas in brief while
Caught his unbroken limbs from the dark field,
And followed to the city. It chanced that both
Brake into hall together, worn and pale.
There with her knights and dames was Guinevere.
Full wonderingly she gazed on Lancelot
So soon returned, and then on Pelleas, him
Who had not greeted her, but cast himself
Down on a bench, hard-breathing. 'Have ye fought?'
She asked of Lancelot. 'Ay, my Queen,' he said.
'And hast thou overthrown him?' 'Ay, my Queen.'
Then she, turning to Pelleas, 'O young knight,
Hath the great heart of knighthood in thee failed
So far thou canst not bide, unfrowardly,
A fall from him?' Then, for he answered not,
'Or hast thou other griefs? If I, the Queen,
May help them, loose thy tongue, and let me know.'
But Pelleas lifted up an eye so fierce
She quailed; and he, hissing 'I have no sword,'
Sprang from the door into the dark. The Queen
Looked hard upon her lover, he on her;
And each foresaw the dolorous day to be:
And all talk died, as in a grove all song
Beneath the shadow of some bird of prey;
Then a long silence came upon the hall,
And Modred thought, 'The time is hard at hand.'

The Last Tournament

Dagonet, the fool, whom Gawain in his mood
Had made mock-knight of Arthur's Table Round,
At Camelot, high above the yellowing woods,
Danced like a withered leaf before the hall.
And toward him from the hall, with harp in hand,
And from the crown thereof a carcanet
Of ruby swaying to and fro, the prize
Of Tristram in the jousts of yesterday,
Came Tristram, saying, 'Why skip ye so, Sir Fool?'

For Arthur and Sir Lancelot riding once
Far down beneath a winding wall of rock
Heard a child wail. A stump of oak half-dead,
From roots like some black coil of carven snakes,
Clutched at the crag, and started through mid air
Bearing an eagle's nest: and through the tree
Rushed ever a rainy wind, and through the wind
Pierced ever a child's cry: and crag and tree
Scaling, Sir Lancelot from the perilous nest,
This ruby necklace thrice around her neck,
And all unscarred from beak or talon, brought
A maiden babe; which Arthur pitying took,
Then gave it to his Queen to rear: the Queen
But coldly acquiescing, in her white arms
Received, and after loved it tenderly,
And named it Nestling; so forgot herself
A moment, and her cares; till that young life
Being smitten in mid heaven with mortal cold
Past from her; and in time the carcanet
Vext her with plaintive memories of the child:
So she, delivering it to Arthur, said,
'Take thou the jewels of this dead innocence,
And make them, an thou wilt, a tourney-prize.'

To whom the King, 'Peace to thine eagle-borne
Dead nestling, and this honour after death,
Following thy will! but, O my Queen, I muse
Why ye not wear on arm, or neck, or zone
Those diamonds that I rescued from the tarn,
And Lancelot won, methought, for thee to wear.'

'Would rather you had let them fall,' she cried,
'Plunge and be lost—ill-fated as they were,
A bitterness to me!—ye look amazed,
Not knowing they were lost as soon as given—
Slid from my hands, when I was leaning out
Above the river—that unhappy child
Past in her barge: but rosier luck will go
With these rich jewels, seeing that they came
Not from the skeleton of a brother-slayer,
But the sweet body of a maiden babe.
Perchance—who knows?—the purest of thy knights
May win them for the purest of my maids.'

She ended, and the cry of a great jousts
With trumpet-blowings ran on all the ways
From Camelot in among the faded fields

To furthest towers; and everywhere the knights
Armed for a day of glory before the King.
But on the hither side of that loud morn
Into the hall staggered, his visage ribbed
From ear to ear with dogwhip-weals, his nose
Bridge-broken, one eye out, and one hand off,
And one with shattered fingers dangling lame,
A churl, to whom indignantly the King,
'My churl, for whom Christ died, what evil beast
Hath drawn his claws athwart thy face? or fiend?
Man was it who marred heaven's image in thee thus?'
Then, sputtering through the hedge of splintered teeth,
Yet strangers to the tongue, and with blunt stump
Pitch-blackened sawing the air, said the maimed churl,
'He took them and he drave them to his tower—
Some hold he was a table-knight of thine—
A hundred goodly ones—the Red Knight, he—
Lord, I was tending swine, and the Red Knight
Brake in upon me and drave them to his tower;
And when I called upon thy name as one
That doest right by gentle and by churl,
Maimed me and mauled, and would outright have slain,
Save that he sware me to a message, saying,
"Tell thou the King and all his liars, that I
Have founded my Round Table in the North,
And whatsoever his own knights have sworn
My knights have sworn the counter to it—and say
My tower is full of harlots, like his court,
But mine are worthier, seeing they profess
To be none other than themselves—and say
My knights are all adulterers like his own,
But mine are truer, seeing they profess
To be none other; and say his hour is come,
The heathen are upon him, his long lance
Broken, and his Excalibur a straw."
Then Arthur turned to Kay the seneschal,
'Take thou my churl, and tend him curiously
Like a king's heir, till all his hurts be whole.
The heathen—but that ever-climbing wave,
Hurled back again so often in empty foam,
Hath lain for years at rest—and renegades,
Thieves, bandits, leavings of confusion, whom
The wholesome realm is purged of elsewhere,
Friends, through your manhood and your fealty,—now
Make their last head like Satan in the North.
My younger knights, new-made, in whom your flower
Waits to be solid fruit of golden deeds,
Move with me toward their quelling, which achieved,
The loneliest ways are safe from shore to shore.
But thou, Sir Lancelot, sitting in my place
Enchained tomorrow, arbitrate the field;
For wherefore shouldst thou care to mingle with it,
Only to yield my Queen her own again?
Speak, Lancelot, thou art silent: is it well?'

Thereto Sir Lancelot answered, 'It is well:
Yet better if the King abide, and leave
The leading of his younger knights to me.
Else, for the King has willed it, it is well.'

Then Arthur rose and Lancelot followed him,
And while they stood without the doors, the King
Turned to him saying, 'Is it then so well?
Or mine the blame that oft I seem as he
Of whom was written, "A sound is in his ears"?
The foot that loiters, bidden go,—the glance
That only seems half-loyal to command,—
A manner somewhat fallen from reverence—
Or have I dreamed the bearing of our knights
Tells of a manhood ever less and lower?
Or whence the fear lest this my realm, upreared,
By noble deeds at one with noble vows,
From flat confusion and brute violences,
Reel back into the beast, and be no more?'

He spoke, and taking all his younger knights,
Down the slope city rode, and sharply turned
North by the gate. In her high bower the Queen,
Working a tapestry, lifted up her head,
Watched her lord pass, and knew not that she sighed.
Then ran across her memory the strange rhyme
Of bygone Merlin, 'Where is he who knows?
From the great deep to the great deep he goes.'

But when the morning of a tournament,
By these in earnest those in mockery called
The Tournament of the Dead Innocence,
Brake with a wet wind blowing, Lancelot,
Round whose sick head all night, like birds of prey,
The words of Arthur flying shrieked, arose,
And down a streetway hung with folds of pure
White samite, and by fountains running wine,
Where children sat in white with cups of gold,
Moved to the lists, and there, with slow sad steps
Ascending, filled his double-dragon chair.

He glanced and saw the stately galleries,
Dame, damsel, each through worship of their Queen
White-robed in honour of the stainless child,
And some with scattered jewels, like a bank
Of maiden snow mingled with sparks of fire.
He looked but once, and vailed his eyes again.

The sudden trumpet sounded as in a dream
To ears but half-awaked, then one low roll
Of Autumn thunder, and the jousts began:
And ever the wind blew, and yellowing leaf
And gloom and gleam, and shower and shorn plume
Went down it. Sighing wearily, as one
Who sits and gazes on a faded fire,
When all the goodlier guests are past away,
Sat their great umpire, looking o'er the lists.
He saw the laws that ruled the tournament
Broken, but spake not; once, a knight cast down

Before his throne of arbitration cursed
The dead babe and the follies of the King;
And once the laces of a helmet cracked,
And showed him, like a vermin in its hole,
Modred, a narrow face: anon he heard
The voice that billowed round the barriers roar
An ocean-sounding welcome to one knight,
But newly-entered, taller than the rest,
And armoured all in forest green, whereon
There tript a hundred tiny silver deer,
And wearing but a holly-spray for crest,
With ever-scattering berries, and on shield
A spear, a harp, a bugle—Tristram—late
From overseas in Brittany returned,
And marriage with a princess of that realm,
Isolt the White—Sir Tristram of the Woods—
Whom Lancelot knew, had held sometime with pain
His own against him, and now yearned to shake
The burthen off his heart in one full shock
With Tristram even to death: his strong hands gript
And dented the gilt dragons right and left,
Until he groaned for wrath—so many of those,
That ware their ladies' colours on the casque,
Drew from before Sir Tristram to the bounds,
And there with gibes and flickering mockeries
Stood, while he muttered, 'Craven crests! O shame!
What faith have these in whom they swear to love?
The glory of our Round Table is no more.'

So Tristram won, and Lancelot gave, the gems,
Not speaking other word than 'Hast thou won?
Art thou the purest, brother? See, the hand
Wherewith thou takest this, is red!' to whom
Tristram, half plagued by Lancelot's languorous mood,
Made answer, 'Ay, but wherefore toss me this
Like a dry bone cast to some hungry hound?
Lest be thy fair Queen's fantasy. Strength of heart
And might of limb, but mainly use and skill,
Are winners in this pastime of our King.
My hand—belike the lance hath dript upon it—
No blood of mine, I trow; but O chief knight,
Right arm of Arthur in the battlefield,
Great brother, thou nor I have made the world;
Be happy in thy fair Queen as I in mine.'

And Tristram round the gallery made his horse
Caracole; then bowed his homage, bluntly saying,
'Fair damsels, each to him who worships each
Sole Queen of Beauty and of love, behold
This day my Queen of Beauty is not here.'
And most of these were mute, some angered, one
Murmuring, 'All courtesy is dead,' and one,
'The glory of our Round Table is no more.'

Then fell thick rain, plume droopt and mantle clung,
And pettish cries awoke, and the wan day
Went glooming down in wet and weariness:

But under her black brows a swarthy one
 Laughed shrilly, crying, 'Praise the patient saints,
 Our one white day of Innocence hath past,
 Though somewhat draggled at the skirt. So be it.
 The snowdrop only, flowering through the year,
 Would make the world as blank as Winter-tide.
 Come—let us gladden their sad eyes, our Queen's
 And Lancelot's, at this night's solemnity
 With all the kindlier colours of the field.'

So dame and damsel glittered at the feast
 Variously gay: for he that tells the tale
 Likened them, saying, as when an hour of cold
 Falls on the mountain in midsummer snows,
 And all the purple slopes of mountain flowers
 Pass under white, till the warm hour returns
 With veer of wind, and all are flowers again;
 So dame and damsel cast the simple white,
 And glowing in all colours, the live grass,
 Rose-campion, bluebell, kingcup, poppy, glanced
 About the revels, and with mirth so loud
 Beyond all use, that, half-amazed, the Queen,
 And wroth at Tristram and the lawless jousts,
 Brake up their sports, then slowly to her bower
 Parted, and in her bosom pain was lord.

And little Dagonet on the morrow morn,
 High over all the yellowing Autumn-tide,
 Danced like a withered leaf before the hall.
 Then Tristram saying, 'Why skip ye so, Sir Fool?'
 Wheeled round on either heel, Dagonet replied,
 'Belike for lack of wiser company;
 Or being fool, and seeing too much wit
 Makes the world rotten, why, belike I skip
 To know myself the wisest knight of all.'
 'Ay, fool,' said Tristram, 'but 'tis eating dry
 To dance without a catch, a roundelay
 To dance to.' Then he twangled on his harp,
 And while he twangled little Dagonet stood
 Quiet as any water-sodden log
 Stayed in the wandering warble of a brook;
 But when the twangling ended, skipt again;
 And being asked, 'Why skipt ye not, Sir Fool?'
 Made answer, 'I had liefer twenty years
 Skip to the broken music of my brains
 Than any broken music thou canst make.'
 Then Tristram, waiting for the quip to come,
 'Good now, what music have I broken, fool?'
 And little Dagonet, skipping, 'Arthur, the King's;
 For when thou playest that air with Queen Isolt,
 Thou makest broken music with thy bride,
 Her daintier namesake down in Brittany—
 And so thou breakest Arthur's music too.'
 'Save for that broken music in thy brains,
 Sir Fool,' said Tristram, 'I would break thy head.
 Fool, I came too late, the heathen wars were o'er,

The life had flown, we sware but by the shell—
I am but a fool to reason with a fool—
Come, thou art crabbed and sour: but lean me down,
Sir Dagonet, one of thy long asses' ears,
And harken if my music be not true.

"Free love—free field—we love but while we may:
The woods are hushed, their music is no more:
The leaf is dead, the yearning past away:
New leaf, new life—the days of frost are o'er:
New life, new love, to suit the newer day:
New loves are sweet as those that went before:
Free love—free field—we love but while we may."

'Ye might have moved slow-measure to my tune,
Not stood stockstill. I made it in the woods,
And heard it ring as true as tested gold.'

But Dagonet with one foot poised in his hand,
'Friend, did ye mark that fountain yesterday
Made to run wine?—but this had run itself
All out like a long life to a sour end—
And them that round it sat with golden cups
To hand the wine to whosoever came—
The twelve small damosels white as Innocence,
In honour of poor Innocence the babe,
Who left the gems which Innocence the Queen
Lent to the King, and Innocence the King
Gave for a prize—and one of those white slips
Handed her cup and piped, the pretty one,
"Drink, drink, Sir Fool," and thereupon I drank,
Spat—pish—the cup was gold, the draught was mud.'

And Tristram, 'Was it muddier than thy gibes?
Is all the laughter gone dead out of thee?—
Not marking how the knighthood mock thee, fool—
"Fear God: honour the King—his one true knight—
Sole follower of the vows"—for here be they
Who knew thee swine enow before I came,
Smuttier than blasted grain: but when the King
Had made thee fool, thy vanity so shot up
It frightened all free fool from out thy heart;
Which left thee less than fool, and less than swine,
A naked aught—yet swine I hold thee still,
For I have flung thee pearls and find thee swine.'

And little Dagonet mincing with his feet,
'Knight, an ye fling those rubies round my neck
In lieu of hers, I'll hold thou hast some touch
Of music, since I care not for thy pearls.
Swine? I have wallowed, I have washed—the world
Is flesh and shadow—I have had my day.
The dirty nurse, Experience, in her kind
Hath fouled me—an I wallowed, then I washed—
I have had my day and my philosophies—
And thank the Lord I am King Arthur's fool.
Swine, say ye? swine, goats, asses, rams and geese
Trooped round a Paynim harper once, who thrummed

On such a wire as musically as thou
Some such fine song—but never a king's fool.'

And Tristram, 'Then were swine, goats, asses, geese
The wiser fools, seeing thy Paynim bard
Had such a mastery of his mystery
That he could harp his wife up out of hell.'

Then Dagonet, turning on the ball of his foot,
'And whither harp'st thou thine? down! and thyself
Down! and two more: a helpful harper thou,
That harpest downward! Dost thou know the star
We call the harp of Arthur up in heaven?'

And Tristram, 'Ay, Sir Fool, for when our King
Was victor wellnigh day by day, the knights,
Glorying in each new glory, set his name
High on all hills, and in the signs of heaven.'

And Dagonet answered, 'Ay, and when the land
Was freed, and the Queen false, ye set yourself
To babble about him, all to show your wit—
And whether he were King by courtesy,
Or King by right—and so went harping down
The black king's highway, got so far, and grew
So witty that ye played at ducks and drakes
With Arthur's vows on the great lake of fire.
Tuwhoo! do ye see it? do ye see the star?'

'Nay, fool,' said Tristram, 'not in open day.'
And Dagonet, 'Nay, nor will: I see it and hear.
It makes a silent music up in heaven,
And I, and Arthur and the angels hear,
And then we skip.' 'Lo, fool,' he said, 'ye talk
Fool's treason: is the King thy brother fool?'
Then little Dagonet clapt his hands and shrilled,
'Ay, ay, my brother fool, the king of fools!
Conceits himself as God that he can make
Figs out of thistles, silk from bristles, milk
From burning spurge, honey from hornet-combs,
And men from beasts—Long live the king of fools!'

And down the city Dagonet danced away;
But through the slowly-mellowing avenues
And solitary passes of the wood
Rode Tristram toward Lyonnesse and the west.
Before him fled the face of Queen Isolt
With ruby-circled neck, but evermore
Past, as a rustle or twitter in the wood
Made dull his inner, keen his outer eye
For all that walked, or crept, or perched, or flew.
Anon the face, as, when a gust hath blown,
Unruffling waters re-collect the shape
Of one that in them sees himself, returned;
But at the slot or fewmets of a deer,
Or even a fallen feather, vanished again.

So on for all that day from lawn to lawn
Through many a league-long bower he rode. At length
A lodge of intertwisted beechen-boughs

Furze-crammed, and bracken-rooft, the which himself
Built for a summer day with Queen Isolt
Against a shower, dark in the golden grove
Appearing, sent his fancy back to where
She lived a moon in that low lodge with him:
Till Mark her lord had past, the Cornish King,
With six or seven, when Tristram was away,
And snatched her thence; yet dreading worse than shame
Her warrior Tristram, spake not any word,
But bode his hour, devising wretchedness.

And now that desert lodge to Tristram lookt
So sweet, that halting, in he past, and sank
Down on a drift of foliage random-blown;
But could not rest for musing how to smoothe
And sleek his marriage over to the Queen.
Perchance in lone Tintagil far from all
The tonguesters of the court she had not heard.
But then what folly had sent him overseas
After she left him lonely here? a name?
Was it the name of one in Brittany,
Isolt, the daughter of the King? 'Isolt
Of the white hands' they called her: the sweet name
Allured him first, and then the maid herself,
Who served him well with those white hands of hers,
And loved him well, until himself had thought
He loved her also, wedded easily,
But left her all as easily, and returned.
The black-blue Irish hair and Irish eyes
Had drawn him home—what marvel? then he laid
His brows upon the drifted leaf and dreamed.

He seemed to pace the strand of Brittany
Between Isolt of Britain and his bride,
And showed them both the ruby-chain, and both
Began to struggle for it, till his Queen
Graspt it so hard, that all her hand was red.
Then cried the Breton, 'Look, her hand is red!
These be no rubies, this is frozen blood,
And melts within her hand—her hand is hot
With ill desires, but this I gave thee, look,
Is all as cool and white as any flower.'
Followed a rush of eagle's wings, and then
A whimpering of the spirit of the child,
Because the twain had spoiled her carcanet.

He dreamed; but Arthur with a hundred spears
Rode far, till o'er the illimitable reed,
And many a glancing plash and sallowy isle,
The wide-winged sunset of the misty marsh
Glared on a huge machicolated tower
That stood with open doors, whereout was rolled
A roar of riot, as from men secure
Amid their marshes, ruffians at their ease
Among their harlot-brides, an evil song.
'Lo there,' said one of Arthur's youth, for there,
High on a grim dead tree before the tower,

A goodly brother of the Table Round
Swung by the neck: and on the boughs a shield
Showing a shower of blood in a field noir,
And therebeside a horn, inflamed the knights
At that dishonour done the gilded spur,
Till each would clash the shield, and blow the horn.
But Arthur waved them back. Alone he rode.
Then at the dry harsh roar of the great horn,
That sent the face of all the marsh aloft
An ever upward-rushing storm and cloud
Of shriek and plume, the Red Knight heard, and all,
Even to tipmost lance and topmost helm,
In blood-red armour sallying, howled to the King,
'The teeth of Hell flay bare and gnash thee flat!—
Lo! art thou not that eunuch-hearted King
Who fain had clipt free manhood from the world—
The woman-worshipper? Yea, God's curse, and I!
Slain was the brother of my paramour
By a knight of thine, and I that heard her whine
And snivel, being eunuch-hearted too,
Sware by the scorpion-worm that twists in hell,
And stings itself to everlasting death,
To hang whatever knight of thine I fought
And tumbled. Art thou King? —Look to thy life!'

He ended: Arthur knew the voice; the face
Wellnigh was helmet-hidden, and the name
Went wandering somewhere darkling in his mind.
And Arthur deigned not use of word or sword,
But let the drunkard, as he stretched from horse
To strike him, overbalancing his bulk,
Down from the causeway heavily to the swamp
Fall, as the crest of some slow-arching wave,
Heard in dead night along that table-shore,
Drops flat, and after the great waters break
Whitening for half a league, and thin themselves,
Far over sands marbled with moon and cloud,
From less and less to nothing; thus he fell
Head-heavy; then the knights, who watched him, roared
And shouted and leapt down upon the fallen;
There trampled out his face from being known,
And sank his head in mire, and slimed themselves:
Nor heard the King for their own cries, but sprang
Through open doors, and swording right and left
Men, women, on their sodden faces, hurled
The tables over and the wines, and slew
Till all the rafters rang with woman-yells,
And all the pavement streamed with massacre:
Then, echoing yell with yell, they fired the tower,
Which half that autumn night, like the live North,
Red-pulsing up through Alioth and Alcor,
Made all above it, and a hundred meres
About it, as the water Moab saw
Came round by the East, and out beyond them flushed
The long low dune, and lazy-plunging sea.

So all the ways were safe from shore to shore,
But in the heart of Arthur pain was lord.
Then, out of Tristram waking, the red dream
Fled with a shout, and that low lodge returned,
Mid-forest, and the wind among the boughs.
He whistled his good warhorse left to graze
Among the forest greens, vaulted upon him,
And rode beneath an ever-showering leaf,
Till one lone woman, weeping near a cross,
Stayed him. 'Why weep ye?' 'Lord,' she said, 'my man
Hath left me or is dead;' whereon he thought—
'What, if she hate me now? I would not this.
What, if she love me still? I would not that.
I know not what I would'—but said to her,
'Yet weep not thou, lest, if thy mate return,
He find thy favour changed and love thee not'—
Then pressing day by day through Lyonesse
Last in a roky hollow, belling, heard
The hounds of Mark, and felt the goodly hounds
Yelp at his heart, but turning, past and gained
Tintagil, half in sea, and high on land,
A crown of towers.

Down in a casement sat,
A low sea-sunset glorying round her hair
And glossy-throated grace, Isolt the Queen.
And when she heard the feet of Tristram grind
The spiring stone that scaled about her tower,
Flushed, started, met him at the doors, and there
Belted his body with her white embrace,
Crying aloud, 'Not Mark—not Mark, my soul!
The footstep fluttered me at first: not he:
Catlike through his own castle steals my Mark,
But warrior-wise thou stridest through his halls
Who hates thee, as I him—even to the death.
My soul, I felt my hatred for my Mark
Quickened within me, and knew that thou wert nigh.'
To whom Sir Tristram smiling, 'I am here.
Let be thy Mark, seeing he is not thine.'

And drawing somewhat backward she replied,
'Can he be wronged who is not even his own,
But save for dread of thee had beaten me,
Scratched, bitten, blinded, marred me somehow—Mark?
What rights are his that dare not strike for them?
Not lift a hand—not, though he found me thus!
But harken! have ye met him? hence he went
Today for three days' hunting—as he said—
And so returns belike within an hour.
Mark's way, my soul!—but eat not thou with Mark,
Because he hates thee even more than fears;
Nor drink: and when thou passest any wood
Close vizor, lest an arrow from the bush
Should leave me all alone with Mark and hell.
My God, the measure of my hate for Mark
Is as the measure of my love for thee.'

So, plucked one way by hate and one by love,
 Drained of her force, again she sat, and spake
 To Tristram, as he knelt before her, saying,
 'O hunter, and O blower of the horn,
 Harper, and thou hast been a rover too,
 For, ere I mated with my shambling king,
 Ye twain had fallen out about the bride
 Of one—his name is out of me—the prize,
 If prize she were—(what marvel—she could see)—
 Thine, friend; and ever since my craven seeks
 To wreck thee villainously: but, O Sir Knight,
 What dame or damsel have ye kneeled to last?'

And Tristram, 'Last to my Queen Paramount,
 Here now to my Queen Paramount of love
 And loveliness—ay, lovelier than when first
 Her light feet fell on our rough Lyonesse,
 Sailing from Ireland.'

Softly laughed Isolt;
 'Flatter me not, for hath not our great Queen
 My dole of beauty trebled?' and he said,
 'Her beauty is her beauty, and thine thine,
 And thine is more to me—soft, gracious, kind—
 Save when thy Mark is kindled on thy lips
 Most gracious; but she, haughty, even to him,
 Lancelot; for I have seen him wan enow
 To make one doubt if ever the great Queen
 Have yielded him her love.'

To whom Isolt,
 'Ah then, false hunter and false harper, thou
 Who brakest through the scruple of my bond,
 Calling me thy white hind, and saying to me
 That Guinevere had sinned against the highest,
 And I—misyoked with such a want of man—
 That I could hardly sin against the lowest.'

He answered, 'O my soul, be comforted!
 If this be sweet, to sin in leading-strings,
 If here be comfort, and if ours be sin,
 Crowned warrant had we for the crowning sin
 That made us happy: but how ye greet me—fear
 And fault and doubt—no word of that fond tale—
 Thy deep heart-yearnings, thy sweet memories
 Of Tristram in that year he was away.'

And, saddening on the sudden, spake Isolt,
 'I had forgotten all in my strong joy
 To see thee—yearnings?—ay! for, hour by hour,
 Here in the never-ended afternoon,
 O sweeter than all memories of thee,
 Deeper than any yearnings after thee
 Seemed those far-rolling, westward-smiling seas,
 Watched from this tower. Isolt of Britain dashed
 Before Isolt of Brittany on the strand,
 Would that have chilled her bride-kiss? Wedded her?
 Fought in her father's battles? wounded there?
 The King was all fulfilled with gratefulness,

And she, my namesake of the hands, that healed
Thy hurt and heart with unguent and caress—
Well—can I wish her any huger wrong
Than having known thee? her too hast thou left
To pine and waste in those sweet memories.
O were I not my Mark's, by whom all men
Are noble, I should hate thee more than love.'

And Tristram, fondling her light hands, replied,
'Grace, Queen, for being loved: she loved me well.
Did I love her? the name at least I loved.
Isolt?—I fought his battles, for Isolt!
The night was dark; the true star set. Isolt!
The name was ruler of the dark—Isolt?
Care not for her! patient, and prayerful, meek,
Pale-blooded, she will yield herself to God.'

And Isolt answered, 'Yea, and why not I?
Mine is the larger need, who am not meek,
Pale-blooded, prayerful. Let me tell thee now.
Here one black, mute midsummer night I sat,
Lonely, but musing on thee, wondering where,
Murmuring a light song I had heard thee sing,
And once or twice I spake thy name aloud.
Then flashed a levin-brand; and near me stood,
In fuming sulphur blue and green, a fiend—
Mark's way to steal behind one in the dark—
For there was Mark: "He has wedded her," he said,
Not said, but hissed it: then this crown of towers
So shook to such a roar of all the sky,
That here in utter dark I swooned away,
And woke again in utter dark, and cried,
"I will flee hence and give myself to God"—
And thou wert lying in thy new leman's arms.'

Then Tristram, ever dallying with her hand,
'May God be with thee, sweet, when old and gray,
And past desire!' a saying that angered her.
"May God be with thee, sweet, when thou art old,
And sweet no more to me!" I need Him now.
For when had Lancelot uttered aught so gross
Even to the swineherd's malkin in the mast?
The greater man, the greater courtesy.
Far other was the Tristram, Arthur's knight!
But thou, through ever harrying thy wild beasts—
Save that to touch a harp, tilt with a lance
Becomes thee well—art grown wild beast thyself.
How darest thou, if lover, push me even
In fancy from thy side, and set me far
In the gray distance, half a life away,
Her to be loved no more? Unsay it, unswear!
Flatter me rather, seeing me so weak,
Broken with Mark and hate and solitude,
Thy marriage and mine own, that I should suck
Lies like sweet wines: lie to me: I believe.
Will ye not lie? not swear, as there ye kneel,
And solemnly as when ye sware to him,

The man of men, our King—My God, the power
 Was once in vows when men believed the King!
 They lied not then, who swear, and through their vows
 The King prevailing made his realm:—I say,
 Swear to me thou wilt love me even when old,
 Gray-haired, and past desire, and in despair.
 Then Tristram, pacing moodily up and down,
 'Vows! did you keep the vow you made to Mark
 More than I mine? Lied, say ye? Nay, but learnt,
 The vow that binds too strictly snaps itself—
 My knighthood taught me this—ay, being snapt—
 We run more counter to the soul thereof
 Than had we never sworn. I swear no more.
 I swore to the great King, and am forsworn.
 For once—even to the height—I honoured him.
 "Man, is he man at all?" methought, when first
 I rode from our rough Lyonesse, and beheld
 That victor of the Pagan throned in hall—
 His hair, a sun that rayed from off a brow
 Like hillsnow high in heaven, the steel-blue eyes,
 The golden beard that clothed his lips with light—
 Moreover, that weird legend of his birth,
 With Merlin's mystic babble about his end
 Amazed me; then, his foot was on a stool
 Shaped as a dragon; he seemed to me no man,
 But Michael trampling Satan; so I swear,
 Being amazed: but this went by— The vows!
 O ay—the wholesome madness of an hour—
 They served their use, their time; for every knight
 Believed himself a greater than himself,
 And every follower eyed him as a God;
 Till he, being lifted up beyond himself,
 Did mightier deeds than elsewhere he had done,
 And so the realm was made; but then their vows—
 First mainly through that sully of our Queen—
 Began to gall the knighthood, asking whence
 Had Arthur right to bind them to himself?
 Dropt down from heaven? washed up from out the deep?
 They failed to trace him through the flesh and blood
 Of our old kings: whence then? a doubtful lord
 To bind them by inviolable vows,
 Which flesh and blood perforce would violate:
 For feel this arm of mine—the tide within
 Red with free chase and heather-scented air,
 Pulsing full man; can Arthur make me pure
 As any maiden child? lock up my tongue
 From uttering freely what I freely hear?
 Bind me to one? The wide world laughs at it.
 And worldling of the world am I, and know
 The ptarmigan that whitens ere his hour
 Woos his own end; we are not angels here
 Nor shall be: vows—I am woodman of the woods,
 And hear the garnet-headed yaffingale
 Mock them: my soul, we love but while we may;

And therefore is my love so large for thee,
Seeing it is not bounded save by love.'
Here ending, he moved toward her, and she said,
'Good: an I turned away my love for thee
To some one thrice as courteous as thyself—
For courtesy wins woman all as well
As valour may, but he that closes both
Is perfect, he is Lancelot—taller indeed,
Rosier and comelier, thou—but say I loved
This knightliest of all knights, and cast thee back
Thine own small saw, "We love but while we may,"
Well then, what answer?'

He that while she spake,
Mindful of what he brought to adorn her with,
The jewels, had let one finger lightly touch
The warm white apple of her throat, replied,
'Press this a little closer, sweet, until—
Come, I am hungered and half-angered—meat,
Wine, wine—and I will love thee to the death,
And out beyond into the dream to come.'

So then, when both were brought to full accord,
She rose, and set before him all he willed;
And after these had comforted the blood
With meats and wines, and satiated their hearts—
Now talking of their woodland paradise,
The deer, the dews, the fern, the founts, the lawns;
Now mocking at the much ungainliness,
And craven shifts, and long crane legs of Mark—
Then Tristram laughing caught the harp, and sang:

'Ay, ay, O ay—the winds that bend the brier!
A star in heaven, a star within the mere!
Ay, ay, O ay—a star was my desire,
And one was far apart, and one was near:
Ay, ay, O ay—the winds that bow the grass!
And one was water and one star was fire,
And one will ever shine and one will pass.
Ay, ay, O ay—the winds that move the mere.'

Then in the light's last glimmer Tristram showed
And swung the ruby carcanet. She cried,
'The collar of some Order, which our King
Hath newly founded, all for thee, my soul,
For thee, to yield thee grace beyond thy peers.'

'Not so, my Queen,' he said, 'but the red fruit
Grown on a magic oak-tree in mid-heaven,
And won by Tristram as a tourney-prize,
And hither brought by Tristram for his last
Love-offering and peace-offering unto thee.'

He spoke, he turned, then, flinging round her neck,
Claspt it, and cried, 'Thine Order, O my Queen!'
But, while he bowed to kiss the jewelled throat,
Out of the dark, just as the lips had touched,
Behind him rose a shadow and a shriek—
'Mark's way,' said Mark, and clove him through the brain.

That night came Arthur home, and while he climbed,
All in a death-dumb autumn-dripping gloom,
The stairway to the hall, and looked and saw
The great Queen's bower was dark,—about his feet
A voice clung sobbing till he questioned it,
'What art thou?' and the voice about his feet
Sent up an answer, sobbing, 'I am thy fool,
And I shall never make thee smile again.'

Guinevere

Queen Guinevere had fled the court, and sat
There in the holy house at Almesbury
Weeping, none with her save a little maid,
A novice: one low light betwixt them burned
Blurred by the creeping mist, for all abroad,
Beneath a moon unseen albeit at full,
The white mist, like a face-cloth to the face,
Clung to the dead earth, and the land was still.

For hither had she fled, her cause of flight
Sir Modred; he that like a subtle beast
Lay couchant with his eyes upon the throne,
Ready to spring, waiting a chance: for this
He chilled the popular praises of the King
With silent smiles of slow disparagement;
And tampered with the Lords of the White Horse,
Heathen, the brood by Hengist left; and sought
To make disruption in the Table Round
Of Arthur, and to splinter it into feuds
Serving his traitorous end; and all his aims
Were sharpened by strong hate for Lancelot.

For thus it chanced one morn when all the court,
Green-suited, but with plumes that mocked the may,
Had been, their wont, a-maying and returned,
That Modred still in green, all ear and eye,
Climbed to the high top of the garden-wall
To spy some secret scandal if he might,
And saw the Queen who sat betwixt her best
Enid, and lissome Vivien, of her court
The wiliest and the worst; and more than this
He saw not, for Sir Lancelot passing by
Spied where he couched, and as the gardener's hand
Picks from the colewort a green caterpillar,
So from the high wall and the flowering grove
Of grasses Lancelot plucked him by the heel,
And cast him as a worm upon the way;
But when he knew the Prince though marred with dust,
He, reverencing king's blood in a bad man,
Made such excuses as he might, and these
Full knightly without scorn; for in those days
No knight of Arthur's noblest dealt in scorn;
But, if a man were halt or hunched, in him
By those whom God had made full-limbed and tall,
Scorn was allowed as part of his defect,
And he was answered softly by the King

And all his Table. So Sir Lancelot holp
To raise the Prince, who rising twice or thrice
Full sharply smote his knees, and smiled, and went:
But, ever after, the small violence done
Rankled in him and ruffled all his heart,
As the sharp wind that ruffles all day long
A little bitter pool about a stone
On the bare coast.

But when Sir Lancelot told
This matter to the Queen, at first she laughed
Lightly, to think of Modred's dusty fall,
Then shuddered, as the village wife who cries
'I shudder, some one steps across my grave;'
Then laughed again, but faintlier, for indeed
She half-foresaw that he, the subtle beast,
Would track her guilt until he found, and hers
Would be for evermore a name of scorn.
Henceforward rarely could she front in hall,
Or elsewhere, Modred's narrow foxy face,
Heart-hiding smile, and gray persistent eye:
Henceforward too, the Powers that tend the soul,
To help it from the death that cannot die,
And save it even in extremes, began
To vex and plague her. Many a time for hours,
Beside the placid breathings of the King,
In the dead night, grim faces came and went
Before her, or a vague spiritual fear—
Like to some doubtful noise of creaking doors,
Heard by the watcher in a haunted house,
That keeps the rust of murder on the walls—
Held her awake: or if she slept, she dreamed
An awful dream; for then she seemed to stand
On some vast plain before a setting sun,
And from the sun there swiftly made at her
A ghastly something, and its shadow flew
Before it, till it touched her, and she turned—
When lo! her own, that broadening from her feet,
And blackening, swallowed all the land, and in it
Far cities burnt, and with a cry she woke.
And all this trouble did not pass but grew;
Till even the clear face of the guileless King,
And trustful courtesies of household life,
Became her bane; and at the last she said,
'O Lancelot, get thee hence to thine own land,
For if thou tarry we shall meet again,
And if we meet again, some evil chance
Will make the smouldering scandal break and blaze
Before the people, and our lord the King.'
And Lancelot ever promised, but remained,
And still they met and met. Again she said,
'O Lancelot, if thou love me get thee hence.'
And then they were agreed upon a night
(When the good King should not be there) to meet
And part for ever. Vivien, lurking, heard.

She told Sir Modred. Passion-pale they met
 And greeted. Hands in hands, and eye to eye,
 Low on the border of her couch they sat
 Stammering and staring. It was their last hour,
 A madness of farewells. And Modred brought
 His creatures to the basement of the tower
 For testimony; and crying with full voice
 'Traitor, come out, ye are trapt at last,' aroused
 Lancelot, who rushing outward lionlike
 Leapt on him, and hurled him headlong, and he fell
 Stunned, and his creatures took and bare him off,
 And all was still: then she, 'The end is come,
 And I am shamed for ever;' and he said,
 'Mine be the shame; mine was the sin: but rise,
 And fly to my strong castle overseas:
 There will I hide thee, till my life shall end,
 There hold thee with my life against the world.'
 She answered, 'Lancelot, wilt thou hold me so?
 Nay, friend, for we have taken our farewells.
 Would God that thou couldst hide me from myself!
 Mine is the shame, for I was wife, and thou
 Unwedded: yet rise now, and let us fly,
 For I will draw me into sanctuary,
 And bide my doom.' So Lancelot got her horse,
 Set her thereon, and mounted on his own,
 And then they rode to the divided way,
 There kissed, and parted weeping: for he past,
 Love-loyal to the least wish of the Queen,
 Back to his land; but she to Almesbury
 Fled all night long by glimmering waste and weald,
 And heard the Spirits of the waste and weald
 Moan as she fled, or thought she heard them moan:
 And in herself she moaned 'Too late, too late!'
 Till in the cold wind that foreruns the morn,
 A blot in heaven, the Raven, flying high,
 Croaked, and she thought, 'He spies a field of death;
 For now the Heathen of the Northern Sea,
 Lured by the crimes and frailties of the court,
 Begin to slay the folk, and spoil the land.'
 And when she came to Almesbury she spake
 There to the nuns, and said, 'Mine enemies
 Pursue me, but, O peaceful Sisterhood,
 Receive, and yield me sanctuary, nor ask
 Her name to whom ye yield it, till her time
 To tell you:' and her beauty, grace and power,
 Wrought as a charm upon them, and they spared
 To ask it.

So the stately Queen abode
 For many a week, unknown, among the nuns;
 Nor with them mixed, nor told her name, nor sought,
 Wrapt in her grief, for housel or for shrift,
 But communed only with the little maid,
 Who pleased her with a babbling heedlessness
 Which often lured her from herself; but now,

This night, a rumour wildly blown about
Came, that Sir Modred had usurped the realm,
And leagued him with the heathen, while the King
Was waging war on Lancelot: then she thought,
'With what a hate the people and the King
Must hate me,' and bowed down upon her hands
Silent, until the little maid, who brooked
No silence, brake it, uttering, 'Late! so late!
What hour, I wonder, now?' and when she drew
No answer, by and by began to hum
An air the nuns had taught her; 'Late, so late!'—
Which when she heard, the Queen looked up, and said,
'O maiden, if indeed ye list to sing,
Sing, and unbind my heart that I may weep.'
Whereat full willingly sang the little maid.
'Late, late, so late! and dark the night and chill!
Late, late, so late! but we can enter still.
Too late, too late! ye cannot enter now.
'No light had we: for that we do repent;
And learning this, the bridegroom will relent.
Too late, too late! ye cannot enter now.
'No light: so late! and dark and chill the night!
O let us in, that we may find the light!
Too late, too late: ye cannot enter now.
'Have we not heard the bridegroom is so sweet?
O let us in, though late, to kiss his feet!
No, no, too late! ye cannot enter now.'
So sang the novice, while full passionately,
Her head upon her hands, remembering
Her thought when first she came, wept the sad Queen.
Then said the little novice prattling to her,
'O pray you, noble lady, weep no more;
But let my words, the words of one so small,
Who knowing nothing knows but to obey,
And if I do not there is penance given—
Comfort your sorrows; for they do not flow
From evil done; right sure am I of that,
Who see your tender grace and stateliness.
But weigh your sorrows with our lord the King's,
And weighing find them less; for gone is he
To wage grim war against Sir Lancelot there,
Round that strong castle where he holds the Queen;
And Modred whom he left in charge of all,
The traitor—Ah sweet lady, the King's grief
For his own self, and his own Queen, and realm,
Must needs be thrice as great as any of ours.
For me, I thank the saints, I am not great.
For if there ever come a grief to me
I cry my cry in silence, and have done.
None knows it, and my tears have brought me good:
But even were the griefs of little ones
As great as those of great ones, yet this grief
Is added to the griefs the great must bear,
That howsoever much they may desire

Silence, they cannot weep behind a cloud:

As even here they talk at Almesbury
About the good King and his wicked Queen,
And were I such a King with such a Queen,
Well might I wish to veil her wickedness,
But were I such a King, it could not be.'

Then to her own sad heart muttered the Queen,
'Will the child kill me with her innocent talk?'
But openly she answered, 'Must not I,
If this false traitor have displaced his lord,
Grieve with the common grief of all the realm?'

'Yea,' said the maid, 'this is all woman's grief,
That she is woman, whose disloyal life
Hath wrought confusion in the Table Round
Which good King Arthur founded, years ago,
With signs and miracles and wonders, there
At Camelot, ere the coming of the Queen.'

Then thought the Queen within herself again,
'Will the child kill me with her foolish prate?'
But openly she spake and said to her,
'O little maid, shut in by nunnery walls,
What canst thou know of Kings and Tables Round,
Or what of signs and wonders, but the signs
And simple miracles of thy nunnery?'

To whom the little novice garrulously,
'Yea, but I know: the land was full of signs
And wonders ere the coming of the Queen.
So said my father, and himself was knight
Of the great Table—at the founding of it;
And rode thereto from Lyonesse, and he said
That as he rode, an hour or maybe twain
After the sunset, down the coast, he heard
Strange music, and he paused, and turning—there,
All down the lonely coast of Lyonesse,
Each with a beacon-star upon his head,
And with a wild sea-light about his feet,
He saw them—headland after headland flame
Far on into the rich heart of the west:
And in the light the white mermaiden swam,
And strong man-breasted things stood from the sea,
And sent a deep sea-voice through all the land,
To which the little elves of chasm and cleft
Made answer, sounding like a distant horn.
So said my father—yea, and furthermore,
Next morning, while he past the dim-lit woods,
Himself beheld three spirits mad with joy
Come dashing down on a tall wayside flower,
That shook beneath them, as the thistle shakes
When three gray linnets wrangle for the seed:
And still at evenings on before his horse
The flickering fairy-circle wheeled and broke
Flying, and linked again, and wheeled and broke
Flying, for all the land was full of life.
And when at last he came to Camelot,

A wreath of airy dancers hand-in-hand
Swung round the lighted lantern of the hall;
And in the hall itself was such a feast
As never man had dreamed; for every knight
Had whatsoever meat he longed for served
By hands unseen; and even as he said
Down in the cellars merry bloated things
Shouldered the spigot, straddling on the butts
While the wine ran: so glad were spirits and men
Before the coming of the sinful Queen.'

Then spake the Queen and somewhat bitterly,
'Were they so glad? ill prophets were they all,
Spirits and men: could none of them foresee,
Not even thy wise father with his signs
And wonders, what has fallen upon the realm?'

To whom the novice garrulously again,
'Yea, one, a bard; of whom my father said,
Full many a noble war-song had he sung,
Even in the presence of an enemy's fleet,
Between the steep cliff and the coming wave;
And many a mystic lay of life and death
Had chanted on the smoky mountain-tops,
When round him bent the spirits of the hills
With all their dewy hair blown back like flame:
So said my father—and that night the bard
Sang Arthur's glorious wars, and sang the King
As wellnigh more than man, and railed at those
Who called him the false son of Gorlois:
For there was no man knew from whence he came;
But after tempest, when the long wave broke
All down the thundering shores of Bude and Bos,
There came a day as still as heaven, and then
They found a naked child upon the sands
Of dark Tintagil by the Cornish sea;
And that was Arthur; and they fostered him
Till he by miracle was approven King:
And that his grave should be a mystery
From all men, like his birth; and could he find
A woman in her womanhood as great
As he was in his manhood, then, he sang,
The twain together well might change the world.
But even in the middle of his song
He faltered, and his hand fell from the harp,
And pale he turned, and reeled, and would have fallen,
But that they stayed him up; nor would he tell
His vision; but what doubt that he foresaw
This evil work of Lancelot and the Queen?'

Then thought the Queen, 'Lo! they have set her on,
Our simple-seeming Abbess and her nuns,
To play upon me,' and bowed her head nor spake.
Whereat the novice crying, with clasped hands,
Shame on her own garrulity garrulously,
Said the good nuns would check her gadding tongue
Full often, 'and, sweet lady, if I seem

To vex an ear too sad to listen to me,
Unmannerly, with prattling and the tales
Which my good father told me, check me too
Nor let me shame my father's memory, one
Of noblest manners, though himself would say
Sir Lancelot had the noblest; and he died,
Killed in a tilt, come next, five summers back,
And left me; but of others who remain,
And of the two first-famed for courtesy—
And pray you check me if I ask amiss—
But pray you, which had noblest, while you moved
Among them, Lancelot or our lord the King?’

Then the pale Queen looked up and answered her,
‘Sir Lancelot, as became a noble knight,
Was gracious to all ladies, and the same
In open battle or the tilting-field
Forbore his own advantage, and the King
In open battle or the tilting-field
Forbore his own advantage, and these two
Were the most nobly-mannered men of all;
For manners are not idle, but the fruit
Of loyal nature, and of noble mind.’

‘Yea,’ said the maid, ‘be manners such fair fruit?’
Then Lancelot's needs must be a thousand-fold
Less noble, being, as all rumour runs,
The most disloyal friend in all the world.’

To which a mournful answer made the Queen:
‘O closed about by narrowing nunnery-walls,
What knowest thou of the world, and all its lights
And shadows, all the wealth and all the woe?
If ever Lancelot, that most noble knight,
Were for one hour less noble than himself,
Pray for him that he scape the doom of fire,
And weep for her that drew him to his doom.’

‘Yea,’ said the little novice, ‘I pray for both;
But I should all as soon believe that his,
Sir Lancelot's, were as noble as the King's,
As I could think, sweet lady, yours would be
Such as they are, were you the sinful Queen.’

So she, like many another babbler, hurt
Whom she would soothe, and harmed where she would heal;
For here a sudden flush of wrathful heat
Fired all the pale face of the Queen, who cried,
‘Such as thou art be never maiden more
For ever! thou their tool, set on to plague
And play upon, and harry me, petty spy
And traitress.’ When that storm of anger brake
From Guinevere, aghast the maiden rose,
White as her veil, and stood before the Queen
As tremulously as foam upon the beach
Stands in a wind, ready to break and fly,
And when the Queen had added ‘Get thee hence,’
Fled frightened. Then that other left alone
Sighed, and began to gather heart again,

Saying in herself, 'The simple, fearful child
Meant nothing, but my own too-fearful guilt,
Simpler than any child, betrays itself.
But help me, heaven, for surely I repent.
For what is true repentance but in thought—
Not even in inmost thought to think again
The sins that made the past so pleasant to us:
And I have sworn never to see him more,
To see him more.'

And even in saying this,
Her memory from old habit of the mind
Went slipping back upon the golden days
In which she saw him first, when Lancelot came,
Reputed the best knight and goodliest man,
Ambassador, to lead her to his lord
Arthur, and led her forth, and far ahead
Of his and her retinue moving, they,
Rapt in sweet talk or lively, all on love
And sport and tilts and pleasure, (for the time
Was maytime, and as yet no sin was dreamed,)
Rode under groves that looked a paradise
Of blossom, over sheets of hyacinth
That seemed the heavens upbreking through the earth,
And on from hill to hill, and every day
Beheld at noon in some delicious dale
The silk pavilions of King Arthur raised
For brief repast or afternoon repose
By couriers gone before; and on again,
Till yet once more ere set of sun they saw
The Dragon of the great Pendragonship,
That crowned the state pavilion of the King,
Blaze by the rushing brook or silent well.

But when the Queen immersed in such a trance,
And moving through the past unconsciously,
Came to that point where first she saw the King
Ride toward her from the city, sighed to find
Her journey done, glanced at him, thought him cold,
High, self-contained, and passionless, not like him,
'Not like my Lancelot'—while she brooded thus
And grew half-guilty in her thoughts again,
There rode an armed warrior to the doors.
A murmuring whisper through the nunnery ran,
Then on a sudden a cry, 'The King.' She sat
Stiff-stricken, listening; but when armed feet
Through the long gallery from the outer doors
Rang coming, prone from off her seat she fell,
And grovelled with her face against the floor:
There with her milkwhite arms and shadowy hair
She made her face a darkness from the King:
And in the darkness heard his armed feet
Pause by her; then came silence, then a voice,
Monotonous and hollow like a Ghost's
Denouncing judgment, but though changed, the King's:
'Liest thou here so low, the child of one

I honoured, happy, dead before thy shame?
Well is it that no child is born of thee.
The children born of thee are sword and fire,
Red ruin, and the breaking up of laws,
The craft of kindred and the Godless hosts
Of heathen swarming o'er the Northern Sea;
Whom I, while yet Sir Lancelot, my right arm,
The mightiest of my knights, abode with me,
Have everywhere about this land of Christ
In twelve great battles ruining overthrown.
And knowest thou now from whence I come—from him
From waging bitter war with him: and he,
That did not shun to smite me in worse way,
Had yet that grace of courtesy in him left,
He spared to lift his hand against the King
Who made him knight: but many a knight was slain;
And many more, and all his kith and kin
Clave to him, and abode in his own land.
And many more when Modred raised revolt,
Forgetful of their troth and fealty, clave
To Modred, and a remnant stays with me.
And of this remnant will I leave a part,
True men who love me still, for whom I live,
To guard thee in the wild hour coming on,
Lest but a hair of this low head be harmed.
Fear not: thou shalt be guarded till my death.
Howbeit I know, if ancient prophecies
Have erred not, that I march to meet my doom.
Thou hast not made my life so sweet to me,
That I the King should greatly care to live;
For thou hast spoilt the purpose of my life.
Bear with me for the last time while I show,
Even for thy sake, the sin which thou hast sinned.
For when the Roman left us, and their law
Relaxed its hold upon us, and the ways
Were filled with rapine, here and there a deed
Of prowess done redressed a random wrong.
But I was first of all the kings who drew
The knighthood-errant of this realm and all
The realms together under me, their Head,
In that fair Order of my Table Round,
A glorious company, the flower of men,
To serve as model for the mighty world,
And be the fair beginning of a time.
I made them lay their hands in mine and swear
To reverence the King, as if he were
Their conscience, and their conscience as their King,
To break the heathen and uphold the Christ,
To ride abroad redressing human wrongs,
To speak no slander, no, nor listen to it,
To honour his own word as if his God's,
To lead sweet lives in purest chastity,
To love one maiden only, cleave to her,
And worship her by years of noble deeds,
Until they won her; for indeed I knew

Of no more subtle master under heaven
Than is the maiden passion for a maid,
Not only to keep down the base in man,
But teach high thought, and amiable words
And courtliness, and the desire of fame,
And love of truth, and all that makes a man.
And all this throve before I wedded thee,
Believing, "lo mine helpmate, one to feel
My purpose and rejoicing in my joy."
Then came thy shameful sin with Lancelot;
Then came the sin of Tristram and Isolt;
Then others, following these my mightiest knights,
And drawing foul ensample from fair names,
Sinned also, till the loathsome opposite
Of all my heart had destined did obtain,
And all through thee! so that this life of mine
I guard as God's high gift from scathe and wrong,
Not greatly care to lose; but rather think
How sad it were for Arthur, should he live,
To sit once more within his lonely hall,
And miss the wonted number of my knights,
And miss to hear high talk of noble deeds
As in the golden days before thy sin.
For which of us, who might be left, could speak
Of the pure heart, nor seem to glance at thee?
And in thy bowers of Camelot or of Usk
Thy shadow still would glide from room to room,
And I should evermore be vexed with thee
In hanging robe or vacant ornament,
Or ghostly footfall echoing on the stair.
For think not, though thou wouldst not love thy lord,
Thy lord hast wholly lost his love for thee.
I am not made of so slight elements.
Yet must I leave thee, woman, to thy shame.
I hold that man the worst of public foes
Who either for his own or children's sake,
To save his blood from scandal, lets the wife
Whom he knows false, abide and rule the house:
For being through his cowardice allowed
Her station, taken everywhere for pure,
She like a new disease, unknown to men,
Creeps, no precaution used, among the crowd,
Makes wicked lightnings of her eyes, and saps
The fealty of our friends, and stirs the pulse
With devil's leaps, and poisons half the young.
Worst of the worst were that man he that reigns!
Better the King's waste hearth and aching heart
Than thou reseated in thy place of light,
The mockery of my people, and their bane.'
He paused, and in the pause she crept an inch
Nearer, and laid her hands about his feet.
Far off a solitary trumpet blew.
Then waiting by the doors the warhorse neighed
At a friend's voice, and he spake again:

'Yet think not that I come to urge thy crimes,
I did not come to curse thee, Guinevere,
I, whose vast pity almost makes me die
To see thee, laying there thy golden head,
My pride in happier summers, at my feet.
The wrath which forced my thoughts on that fierce law,
The doom of treason and the flaming death,
(When first I learnt thee hidden here) is past.
The pang—which while I weighed thy heart with one
Too wholly true to dream untruth in thee,
Made my tears burn—is also past—in part.
And all is past, the sin is sinned, and I,
Lo! I forgive thee, as Eternal God
Forgives: do thou for thine own soul the rest.
But how to take last leave of all I loved?
O golden hair, with which I used to play
Not knowing! O imperial-moulded form,
And beauty such as never woman wore,
Until it became a kingdom's curse with thee—
I cannot touch thy lips, they are not mine,
But Lancelot's: nay, they never were the King's.
I cannot take thy hand: that too is flesh,
And in the flesh thou hast sinned; and mine own flesh,
Here looking down on thine polluted, cries
"I loathe thee:" yet not less, O Guinevere,
For I was ever virgin save for thee,
My love through flesh hath wrought into my life
So far, that my doom is, I love thee still.
Let no man dream but that I love thee still.
Perchance, and so thou purify thy soul,
And so thou lean on our fair father Christ,
Hereafter in that world where all are pure
We two may meet before high God, and thou
Wilt spring to me, and claim me thine, and know
I am thine husband—not a smaller soul,
Nor Lancelot, nor another. Leave me that,
I charge thee, my last hope. Now must I hence.
Through the thick night I hear the trumpet blow:
They summon me their King to lead mine hosts
Far down to that great battle in the west,
Where I must strike against the man they call
My sister's son—no kin of mine, who leagues
With Lords of the White Horse, heathen, and knights,
Traitors—and strike him dead, and meet myself
Death, or I know not what mysterious doom.
And thou remaining here wilt learn the event;
But hither shall I never come again,
Never lie by thy side; see thee no more—
Farewell!'

And while she grovelled at his feet,
She felt the King's breath wander o'er her neck,
And in the darkness o'er her fallen head,
Perceived the waving of his hands that blest.
Then, listening till those armed steps were gone,

Rose the pale Queen, and in her anguish found
The casement: 'peradventure,' so she thought,
'If I might see his face, and not be seen.'
And lo, he sat on horseback at the door!
And near him the sad nuns with each a light
Stood, and he gave them charge about the Queen,
To guard and foster her for evermore.
And while he spake to these his helm was lowered,
To which for crest the golden dragon clung
Of Britain; so she did not see the face,
Which then was as an angel's, but she saw,
Wet with the mists and smitten by the lights,
The Dragon of the great Pendragonship
Blaze, making all the night a steam of fire.
And even then he turned; and more and more
The moony vapour rolling round the King,
Who seemed the phantom of a Giant in it,
Enwound him fold by fold, and made him gray
And grayer, till himself became as mist
Before her, moving ghostlike to his doom.

Then she stretched out her arms and cried aloud
'Oh Arthur!' there her voice brake suddenly,
Then—as a stream that spouting from a cliff
Fails in mid air, but gathering at the base
Re-makes itself, and flashes down the vale—
Went on in passionate utterance:

'Gone—my lord!
Gone through my sin to slay and to be slain!
And he forgave me, and I could not speak.
Farewell? I should have answered his farewell.
His mercy choked me. Gone, my lord the King,
My own true lord! how dare I call him mine?
The shadow of another cleaves to me,
And makes me one pollution: he, the King,
Called me polluted: shall I kill myself?
What help in that? I cannot kill my sin,
If soul be soul; nor can I kill my shame;
No, nor by living can I live it down.
The days will grow to weeks, the weeks to months
The months will add themselves and make the years,
The years will roll into the centuries,
And mine will ever be a name of scorn.
I must not dwell on that defeat of fame.
Let the world be; that is but of the world.
What else? what hope? I think there was a hope,
Except he mocked me when he spake of hope;
His hope he called it; but he never mocks,
For mockery is the fume of little hearts.
And blessed be the King, who hath forgiven
My wickedness to him, and left me hope
That in mine own heart I can live down sin
And be his mate hereafter in the heavens
Before high God. Ah great and gentle lord,
Who wast, as is the conscience of a saint

Among his warring senses, to thy knights—
 To whom my false voluptuous pride, that took
 Full easily all impressions from below,
 Would not look up, or half-despised the height
 To which I would not or I could not climb—
 I thought I could not breathe in that fine air
 That pure severity of perfect light—
 I yearned for warmth and colour which I found
 In Lancelot—now I see thee what thou art,
 Thou art the highest and most human too,
 Not Lancelot, nor another. Is there none
 Will tell the King I love him though so late?
 Now—ere he goes to the great Battle? none:
 Myself must tell him in that purer life,
 But now it were too daring. Ah my God,
 What might I not have made of thy fair world,
 Had I but loved thy highest creature here?
 It was my duty to have loved the highest:
 It surely was my profit had I known:
 It would have been my pleasure had I seen.
 We needs must love the highest when we see it,
 Not Lancelot, nor another.'

Here her hand
 Grasped, made her vail her eyes: she looked and saw
 The novice, weeping, suppliant, and said to her,
 'Yea, little maid, for am I not forgiven?'
 Then glancing up beheld the holy nuns
 All round her, weeping; and her heart was loosed
 Within her, and she wept with these and said,
 'Ye know me then, that wicked one, who broke
 The vast design and purpose of the King.
 O shut me round with narrowing nunnery-walls,
 Meek maidens, from the voices crying "shame."
 I must not scorn myself: he loves me still.
 Let no one dream but that he loves me still.
 So let me, if you do not shudder at me,
 Nor shun to call me sister, dwell with you;
 Wear black and white, and be a nun like you,
 Fast with your fasts, not feasting with your feasts;
 Grieve with your griefs, not grieving at your joys,
 But not rejoicing; mingle with your rites;
 Pray and be prayed for; lie before your shrines;
 Do each low office of your holy house;
 Walk your dim cloister, and distribute dole
 To poor sick people, richer in His eyes
 Who ransomed us, and halier too than I;
 And treat their loathsome hurts and heal mine own;
 And so wear out in almsdeed and in prayer
 The sombre close of that voluptuous day,
 Which wrought the ruin of my lord the King.'

She said: they took her to themselves; and she
 Still hoping, fearing 'is it yet too late?'
 Dwelt with them, till in time their Abbess died.
 Then she, for her good deeds and her pure life,

And for the power of ministration in her,
And likewise for the high rank she had borne,
Was chosen Abbess, there, an Abbess, lived
For three brief years, and there, an Abbess, past
To where beyond these voices there is peace.

The Passing of Arthur

That story which the bold Sir Bedivere,
First made and latest left of all the knights,
Told, when the man was no more than a voice
In the white winter of his age, to those
With whom he dwelt, new faces, other minds.

For on their march to westward, Bedivere,
Who slowly paced among the slumbering host,
Heard in his tent the moanings of the King:

'I found Him in the shining of the stars,
I marked Him in the flowering of His fields,
But in His ways with men I find Him not.
I waged His wars, and now I pass and die.
O me! for why is all around us here
As if some lesser god had made the world,
But had not force to shape it as he would,
Till the High God behold it from beyond,
And enter it, and make it beautiful?
Or else as if the world were wholly fair,
But that these eyes of men are dense and dim,
And have not power to see it as it is:
Perchance, because we see not to the close;—
For I, being simple, thought to work His will,
And have but stricken with the sword in vain;
And all whereon I leaned in wife and friend
Is traitor to my peace, and all my realm
Reels back into the beast, and is no more.
My God, thou hast forgotten me in my death;
Nay—God my Christ—I pass but shall not die.'

Then, ere that last weird battle in the west,
There came on Arthur sleeping, Gawain killed
In Lancelot's war, the ghost of Gawain blown
Along a wandering wind, and past his ear
Went shrilling, 'Hollow, hollow all delight!
Hail, King! tomorrow thou shalt pass away.
Farewell! there is an isle of rest for thee.
And I am blown along a wandering wind,
And hollow, hollow, hollow all delight.'
And fainter onward, like wild birds that change
Their season in the night and wail their way
From cloud to cloud, down the long wind the dream
Shrilled; but in going mingled with dim cries
Far in the moonlit haze among the hills,
As of some lonely city sacked by night,
When all is lost, and wife and child with wail
Pass to new lords; and Arthur woke and called,
'Who spake? A dream. O light upon the wind,
Thine, Gawain, was the voice—are these dim cries

Thine? or doth all that haunts the waste and wild
Mourn, knowing it will go along with me?’

This heard the bold Sir Bedivere and spake:
‘O me, my King, let pass whatever will,
Elves, and the harmless glamour of the field;
But in their stead thy name and glory cling
To all high places like a golden cloud
For ever: but as yet thou shalt not pass.
Light was Gawain in life, and light in death
Is Gawain, for the ghost is as the man;
And care not thou for dreams from him, but rise—
I hear the steps of Modred in the west,
And with him many of thy people, and knights
Once thine, whom thou hast loved, but grosser grown
Than heathen, spitting at their vows and thee.
Right well in heart they know thee for the King.
Arise, go forth and conquer as of old.’

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere:
‘Far other is this battle in the west
Whereto we move, than when we strove in youth,
And brake the petty kings, and fought with Rome,
Or thrust the heathen from the Roman wall,
And shook him through the north. Ill doom is mine
To war against my people and my knights.
The king who fights his people fights himself.
And they my knights, who loved me once, the stroke
That strikes them dead is as my death to me.
Yet let us hence, and find or feel a way
Through this blind haze, which ever since I saw
One lying in the dust at Almesbury,
Hath folded in the passes of the world.’

Then rose the King and moved his host by night,
And ever pushed Sir Modred, league by league,
Back to the sunset bound of Lyonesse—
A land of old upheaven from the abyss
By fire, to sink into the abyss again;
Where fragments of forgotten peoples dwelt,
And the long mountains ended in a coast
Of ever-shifting sand, and far away
The phantom circle of a moaning sea.
There the pursuer could pursue no more,
And he that fled no further fly the King;
And there, that day when the great light of heaven
Burned at his lowest in the rolling year,
On the waste sand by the waste sea they closed.
Nor ever yet had Arthur fought a fight
Like this last, dim, weird battle of the west.
A deathwhite mist slept over sand and sea:
Whereof the chill, to him who breathed it, drew
Down with his blood, till all his heart was cold
With formless fear; and even on Arthur fell
Confusion, since he saw not whom he fought.
For friend and foe were shadows in the mist,
And friend slew friend not knowing whom he slew;

And some had visions out of golden youth,
And some beheld the faces of old ghosts
Look in upon the battle; and in the mist
Was many a noble deed, many a base,
And chance and craft and strength in single fights,
And ever and anon with host to host
Shocks, and the splintering spear, the hard mail hewn,
Shield-breakings, and the clash of brands, the crash
Of battleaxes on shattered helms, and shrieks
After the Christ, of those who falling down
Looked up for heaven, and only saw the mist;
And shouts of heathen and the traitor knights,
Oaths, insults, filth, and monstrous blasphemies,
Sweat, writhings, anguish, labouring of the lungs
In that close mist, and cryings for the light,
Moans of the dying, and voices of the dead.
Last, as by some one deathbed after wail
Of suffering, silence follows, or through death
Or deathlike swoon, thus over all that shore,
Save for some whisper of the seething seas,
A dead hush fell; but when the dolorous day
Grew drearier toward twilight falling, came
A bitter wind, clear from the North, and blew
The mist aside, and with that wind the tide
Rose, and the pale King glanced across the field
Of battle: but no man was moving there;
Nor any cry of Christian heard thereon,
Nor yet of heathen; only the wan wave
Brake in among dead faces, to and fro
Swaying the helpless hands, and up and down
Tumbling the hollow helmets of the fallen,
And shivered brands that once had fought with Rome,
And rolling far along the gloomy shores
The voice of days of old and days to be.
Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere,
And whiter than the mist that all day long
Had held the field of battle was the King:
'Hearest thou this great voice that shakes the world,
And wastes the narrow realm whereon we move,
And beats upon the faces of the dead,
My dead, as though they had not died for me?—
O Bedivere, for on my heart hath fallen
Confusion, till I know not what I am,
Nor whence I am, nor whether I be King.
Behold, I seem but King among the dead.'
Then spake the bold Sir Bedivere: 'My King,
King everywhere! and so the dead have kings,
There also will I worship thee as King.
Yet still thy life is whole, and still I live
Who love thee; but who hates thee, he that brought
The heathen back among us, yonder stands,
Modred, unharmed, the traitor of thine house.'
Then spake the King: 'My house hath been my doom.
But call not thou this traitor of my house

Who hath but dwelt beneath one roof with me.
My house are rather they who sware my vows,
Yea, even while they brake them, owned me King.
And well for thee, saying in my dark hour,
When all the purport of my throne hath failed,
That quick or dead thou holdest me for King.
King am I, whatsoever be their cry;
And one last act of kinghood shalt thou see
Yet, ere I pass.' And uttering this the King
Made at the man: then Modred smote his liege
Hard on that helm which many a heathen sword
Had beaten thin; while Arthur at one blow,
Striking the last stroke with Excalibur,
Slew him, and all but slain himself, he fell.

So all day long the noise of battle rolled
Among the mountains by the winter sea;
Until King Arthur's Table, man by man,
Had fallen in Lyonnesse about their lord,
King Arthur. Then, because his wound was deep,
The bold Sir Bedivere uplifted him,
And bore him to a chapel nigh the field,
A broken chancel with a broken cross,
That stood on a dark strait of barren land:
On one side lay the Ocean, and on one
Lay a great water, and the moon was full.

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere:
'The sequel of today unsolders all
The goodliest fellowship of famous knights
Whereof this world holds record. Such a sleep
They sleep—the men I loved. I think that we
Shall never more, at any future time,
Delight our souls with talk of knightly deeds,
Walking about the gardens and the halls
Of Camelot, as in the days that were.
I perish by this people which I made,—
Though Merlin sware that I should come again
To rule once more; but, let what will be, be,
I am so deeply smitten through the helm
That without help I cannot last till morn.
Thou therefore take my brand Excalibur,
Which was my pride: for thou rememberest how
In those old days, one summer noon, an arm
Rose up from out the bosom of the lake,
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,
Holding the sword—and how I rowed across
And took it, and have worn it, like a king;
And, wheresoever I am sung or told
In aftertime, this also shall be known:
But now delay not: take Excalibur,
And fling him far into the middle mere:
Watch what thou seest, and lightly bring me word.'

To him replied the bold Sir Bedivere:
'It is not meet, Sir King, to leave thee thus,
Aidless, alone, and smitten through the helm—

A little thing may harm a wounded man;
Yet I thy hest will all perform at full,
Watch what I see, and lightly bring thee word.'

So saying, from the ruined shrine he stept,
And in the moon athwart the place of tombs,
Where lay the mighty bones of ancient men,
Old knights, and over them the sea-wind sang
Shrill, chill, with flakes of foam. He, stepping down
By zigzag paths, and juts of pointed rock,
Came on the shining levels of the lake.

There drew he forth the brand Excalibur,
And o'er him, drawing it, the winter moon,
Brightening the skirts of a long cloud, ran forth
And sparkled keen with frost against the hilt:
For all the haft twinkled with diamond sparks,
Myriads of topaz-lights, and jacinth-work
Of subtlest jewellery. He gazed so long
That both his eyes were dazzled as he stood,
This way and that dividing the swift mind,
In act to throw: but at the last it seemed
Better to leave Excalibur concealed
There in the many-knotted waterflags,
That whistled stiff and dry about the marge.
So strode he back slow to the wounded King.

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere:
'Hast thou performed my mission which I gave?
What is it thou hast seen? or what hast heard?'

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere:
'I heard the ripple washing in the reeds,
And the wild water lapping on the crag.'

To whom replied King Arthur, faint and pale:
'Thou hast betrayed thy nature and thy name,
Not rendering true answer, as beseemed
Thy fealty, nor like a noble knight:
For surer sign had followed, either hand,
Or voice, or else a motion of the mere.
This is a shameful thing for men to lie.
Yet now, I charge thee, quickly go again,
As thou art lief and dear, and do the thing
I bade thee, watch, and lightly bring me word.'

Then went Sir Bedivere the second time
Across the ridge, and paced beside the mere,
Counting the dewy pebbles, fixed in thought;
But when he saw the wonder of the hilt,
How curiously and strangely chased, he smote
His palms together, and he cried aloud:

'And if indeed I cast the brand away,
Surely a precious thing, one worthy note,
Should thus be lost for ever from the earth,
Which might have pleased the eyes of many men.
What good should follow this, if this were done?
What harm, undone? Deep harm to disobey,
Seeing obedience is the bond of rule.

Were it well to obey then, if a king demand
An act unprofitable, against himself?
The King is sick, and knows not what he does.
What record, or what relic of my lord
Should be to aftertime, but empty breath
And rumours of a doubt? But were this kept,
Stored in some treasure-house of mighty kings,
Some one might show it at a joust of arms,
Saying, "King Arthur's sword, Excalibur,
Wrought by the lonely maiden of the Lake.
Nine years she wrought it, sitting in the deeps
Upon the hidden bases of the hills."
So might some old man speak in the aftertime
To all the people, winning reverence.
But now much honour and much fame were lost.
So spake he, clouded with his own conceit,
And hid Excalibur the second time,
And so strode back slow to the wounded King.
Then spoke King Arthur, breathing heavily:
'What is it thou hast seen? or what hast heard?'
And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere:
'I heard the water lapping on the crag,
And the long ripple washing in the reeds.'
To whom replied King Arthur, much in wrath:
'Ah, miserable and unkind, untrue,
Unknightly, traitor-hearted! Woe is me!
Authority forgets a dying king,
Laid widowed of the power in his eye
That bowed the will. I see thee what thou art,
For thou, the latest-left of all my knights,
In whom should meet the offices of all,
Thou wouldst betray me for the precious hilt;
Either from lust of gold, or like a girl
Valuing the giddy pleasure of the eyes.
Yet, for a man may fail in duty twice,
And the third time may prosper, get thee hence:
But, if thou spare to fling Excalibur,
I will arise and slay thee with my hands.'
Then quickly rose Sir Bedivere, and ran,
And, leaping down the ridges lightly, plunged
Among the bulrush beds, and clutched the sword,
And strongly wheeled and threw it. The great brand
Made lightnings in the splendour of the moon,
And flashing round and round, and whirled in an arch,
Shot like a streamer of the northern morn,
Seen where the moving isles of winter shock
By night, with noises of the Northern Sea.
So flashed and fell the brand Excalibur:
But ere he dipt the surface, rose an arm
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,
And caught him by the hilt, and brandished him
Three times, and drew him under in the mere.
And lightly went the other to the King.

Then spoke King Arthur, drawing thicker breath:
'Now see I by thine eyes that this is done.
Speak out: what is it thou hast heard, or seen?'

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere:
'Sir King, I closed mine eyelids, lest the gems
Should blind my purpose, for I never saw,
Nor shall see, here or elsewhere, till I die,
Not though I live three lives of mortal men,
So great a miracle as yonder hilt.
Then with both hands I flung him, wheeling him;
But when I looked again, behold an arm,
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,
That caught him by the hilt, and brandished him
Three times, and drew him under in the mere.'

And answer made King Arthur, breathing hard:
'My end draws nigh; 'tis time that I were gone.
Make broad thy shoulders to receive my weight,
And bear me to the margin; yet I fear
My wound hath taken cold, and I shall die.'

So saying, from the pavement he half rose,
Slowly, with pain, reclining on his arm,
And looking wistfully with wide blue eyes
As in a picture. Him Sir Bedivere
Remorsefully regarded through his tears,
And would have spoken, but he found not words;
Then took with care, and kneeling on one knee,
O'er both his shoulders drew the languid hands,
And rising bore him through the place of tombs.

But, as he walked, King Arthur panted hard,
Like one that feels a nightmare on his bed
When all the house is mute. So sighed the King,
Muttering and murmuring at his ear, 'Quick, quick!
I fear it is too late, and I shall die.'

But the other swiftly strode from ridge to ridge,
Clothed with his breath, and looking, as he walked,
Larger than human on the frozen hills.
He heard the deep behind him, and a cry
Before. His own thought drove him like a goad.
Dry clashed his harness in the icy caves
And barren chasms, and all to left and right
The bare black cliff clanged round him, as he based
His feet on juts of slippery crag that rang
Sharp-smitten with the dint of armed heels—
And on a sudden, lo! the level lake,
And the long glories of the winter moon.

Then saw they how there hove a dusky barge,
Dark as a funeral scarf from stem to stern,
Beneath them; and descending they were ware
That all the decks were dense with stately forms,
Black-stoled, black-hooded, like a dream—by these
Three Queens with crowns of gold: and from them rose
A cry that shivered to the tingling stars,
And, as it were one voice, an agony

Of lamentation, like a wind that shrills
All night in a waste land, where no one comes,
Or hath come, since the making of the world.
Then murmured Arthur, 'Place me in the barge.'
So to the barge they came. There those three Queens
Put forth their hands, and took the King, and wept.
But she, that rose the tallest of them all
And fairest, laid his head upon her lap,
And loosed the shattered casque, and chafed his hands,
And called him by his name, complaining loud,
And dropping bitter tears against a brow
Striped with dark blood: for all his face was white
And colourless, and like the withered moon
Smote by the fresh beam of the springing east;
And all his greaves and cuisses dashed with drops
Of onset; and the light and lustrous curls—
That made his forehead like a rising sun
High from the dais-throne—were parched with dust;
Or, clotted into points and hanging loose,
Mixed with the knightly growth that fringed his lips.
So like a shattered column lay the King;
Not like that Arthur who, with lance in rest,
From spur to plume a star of tournament,
Shot through the lists at Camelot, and charged
Before the eyes of ladies and of kings.

Then loudly cried the bold Sir Bedivere:
'Ah! my Lord Arthur, whither shall I go?
Where shall I hide my forehead and my eyes?
For now I see the true old times are dead,
When every morning brought a noble chance,
And every chance brought out a noble knight.
Such times have been not since the light that led
The holy Elders with the gift of myrrh.
But now the whole Round Table is dissolved
Which was an image of the mighty world,
And I, the last, go forth companionless,
And the days darken round me, and the years,
Among new men, strange faces, other minds.'
And slowly answered Arthur from the barge:
'The old order changeth, yielding place to new,
And God fulfils himself in many ways,
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.
Comfort thyself: what comfort is in me?
I have lived my life, and that which I have done
May He within himself make pure! but thou,
If thou shouldst never see my face again,
Pray for my soul. More things are wrought by prayer
Than this world dreams of. Wherefore, let thy voice
Rise like a fountain for me night and day.
For what are men better than sheep or goats
That nourish a blind life within the brain,
If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer
Both for themselves and those who call them friend?
For so the whole round earth is every way

Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.
But now farewell. I am going a long way
With these thou seest—if indeed I go
(For all my mind is clouded with a doubt)—
To the island-valley of Avilion;
Where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow,
Nor ever wind blows loudly; but it lies
Deep-meadowed, happy, fair with orchard lawns
And bowery hollows crowned with summer sea,
Where I will heal me of my grievous wound.’

So said he, and the barge with oar and sail
Moved from the brink, like some full-breasted swan
That, fluting a wild carol ere her death,
Ruffles her pure cold plume, and takes the flood
With swarthy webs. Long stood Sir Bedivere
Revolving many memories, till the hull
Looked one black dot against the verge of dawn,
And on the mere the wailing died away.

But when that moan had past for evermore,
The stillness of the dead world’s winter dawn
Amazed him, and he groaned, ’The King is gone.’
And therewithal came on him the weird rhyme,
’From the great deep to the great deep he goes.’

Whereat he slowly turned and slowly clomb
The last hard footstep of that iron crag;
Thence marked the black hull moving yet, and cried,
’He passes to be King among the dead,
And after healing of his grievous wound
He comes again; but—if he come no more—
O me, be yon dark Queens in yon black boat,
Who shrieked and wailed, the three whereat we gazed
On that high day, when, clothed with living light,
They stood before his throne in silence, friends
Of Arthur, who should help him at his need?’

Then from the dawn it seemed there came, but faint
As from beyond the limit of the world,
Like the last echo born of a great cry,
Sounds, as if some fair city were one voice
Around a king returning from his wars.

Thereat once more he moved about, and clomb
Even to the highest he could climb, and saw,
Straining his eyes beneath an arch of hand,
Or thought he saw, the speck that bare the King,
Down that long water opening on the deep
Somewhere far off, pass on and on, and go
From less to less and vanish into light.
And the new sun rose bringing the new year.

Morris: Sigurd the Volsung

1 SIGMUND.

In this book is told of the earlier days of the volsungs, and of sigmund the father of sigurd, and of his deeds, and of how he died while sigurd was yet unborn in his mother's womb.

Of the dwelling of King Volsung, and the wedding of Signy his daughter.

There was a dwelling of Kings ere the world was waxen old;
Dukes were the door-wards there, and the roofs were thatched with gold;
Earls were the wrights that wrought it, and silver nailed its doors;
Earls' wives were the weaving-women, queens' daughters strewed its floors,
And the masters of its song-craft were the mightiest men that cast
The sails of the storm of battle adown the bickering blast.
There dwelt men merry-hearted, and in hope exceeding great
Met the good days and the evil as they went the way of fate:
There the Gods were unforgotten, yea whiles they walked with men.
Though e'en in that world's beginning rose a murmur now and again
Of the midward time and the fading and the last of the latter days,
And the entering in of the terror, and the death of the People's Praise.
Thus was the dwelling of Volsung, the King of the Midworld's Mark,
As a rose in the winter season, a candle in the dark;
And as in all other matters 'twas all earthly houses' crown,
And the least of its wall-hung shields was a battle-world's renown,
So therein withal was a marvel and a glorious thing to see,
For amidst of its midmost hall-floor sprang up a mighty tree,
That reared its blessings roofward, and wreathed the roof-tree dear
With the glory of the summer and the garland of the year.
I know not how they called it ere Volsung changed his life,
But his dawning of fair promise, and his noontide of the strife,
His eve of the battle-reaping and the garnering of his fame,
Have bred us many a story and named us many a name;
And when men tell of Volsung, they call that war-duke's tree,
That crownèd stem, the Branstock; and so was it told unto me.
So there was the throne of Volsung beneath its blossoming bower.
But high o'er the roof-crest red it rose 'twixt tower and tower,
And therein were the wild hawks dwelling, abiding the dole of their lord;
And they wailed high over the wine, and laughed to the waking sword.
Still were its boughs but for them, when lo on an even of May
Comes a man from Siggeir the King with a word for his mouth to say:
"All hail to thee King Volsung, from the King of the Goths I come:
He hath heard of thy sword victorious and thine abundant home;
He hath heard of thy sons in the battle, the fillers of Odin's Hall;
And a word hath the west-wind blown him, (full fruitful be its fall!)

A word of thy daughter Signy the crown of womanhood:
Now he deems thy friendship goodly, and thine help in the battle good,
And for these will he give his friendship and his battle-aid again:
But if thou wouldst grant his asking, and make his heart full fain,
Then shalt thou give him a matter, saith he, without a price,
—Signy the fairer than fair, Signy the wiser than wise.”

Such words in the hall of the Volsungs spake the Earl of Siggeir the Goth,
Bearing the gifts and the gold, the ring, and the tokens of troth.
But the King’s heart laughed within him and the King’s sons deemed it good;
For they dreamed how they fared with the Goths o’er ocean and acre and wood,
Till all the north was theirs, and the utmost southern lands.

But nought said the snow-white Signy as she sat with folded hands
And gazed at the Goth-king’s Earl till his heart grew heavy and cold,
As one that half remembers a tale that the elders have told,
A story of weird and of woe: then spake King Volsung and said:

“A great king woos thee, daughter; wilt thou lie in a great king’s bed,
And bear earth’s kings on thy bosom, that our name may never die?”

A fire lit up her face, and her voice was e’en as a cry:
“I will sleep in a great king’s bed, I will bear the lords of the earth,
And the wrack and the grief of my youth-days shall be held for nothing worth.”

Then would he question her kindly, as one who loved her sore,
But she put forth her hand and smiled, and her face was flushed no more
“Would God it might otherwise be! but wert thou to will it not,
Yet should I will it and wed him, and rue my life and my lot.”

Lowly and soft she said it; but spake out louder now:
“Be of good cheer, King Volsung! for such a man art thou,
That what thou dost well-counselled, goodly and fair it is,
And what thou dost unwitting, the Gods have bidden thee this:
So work all things together for the fame of thee and thine.
And now meseems at my wedding shall be a hallowed sign,
That shall give thine heart a joyance, whatever shall follow after.”
She spake, and the feast sped on, and the speech and the song and the laughter
Went over the words of boding as the tide of the norland main
Sweeps over the hidden skerry, the home of the shipman’s bane.

So wendeth his way on the morrow that Earl of the Gothland King,
Bearing the gifts and the gold, and King Volsung’s tokening,
And a word in his mouth moreover, a word of blessing and hail,
And a bidding to King Siggeir to come ere the June-tide fail
And wed him to white-hand Signy and bear away his bride,
While sleepeth the field of the fishes amidst the summer-tide.

So on Mid-Summer Even ere the undark night began
Siggeir the King of the Goth-folk went up from the bath of the swan
Unto the Volsung dwelling with many an Earl about;
There through the glimmering thicket the linkèd mail rang out,
And sang as mid the woodways sings the summer-hidden ford:
There were gold-rings God-fashioned, and many a Dwarf-wrought sword,
And many a Queen-wrought kirtle and many a written spear;
So came they to the acres, and drew the threshold near,
And amidst of the garden blossoms, on the grassy, fruit-grown land,
Was Volsung the King of the Wood-world with his sons on either hand;
Therewith down lighted Siggeir the lord of a mighty folk,
Yet showed he by King Volsung as the bramble by the oak,
Nor reached his helm to the shoulder of the least of Volsung’s sons.

And so into the hall they wended, the Kings and their mighty ones;
And they dight the feast full glorious, and drank through the death of the day,
Till the shadowless moon rose upward, till it wended white away;
Then they went to the gold-hung beds, and at last for an hour or twain
Were all things still and silent, save a flaw of the summer rain.

But on the morrow noontide when the sun was high and bare,
More glorious was the banquet, and now was Signy there,
And she sat beside King Siggeir, a glorious bride forsooth;
Ruddy and white was she wrought as the fair-stained sea-beast's tooth,
But she neither laughed nor spake, and her eyes were hard and cold,
And with wandering side-long looks her lord would she behold.
That saw Sigmund her brother, the eldest Volsung son,
And oft he looked upon her, and their eyes met now and anon,
And ruth arose in his heart, and hate of Siggeir the Goth,
And there had he broken the wedding, but for plighted promise and troth.
But those twain were beheld of Siggeir, and he deemed of the Volsung kin,
That amid their might and their malice small honour should he win;
Yet thereof made he no semblance, but abided times to be
And laughed out with the loudest, amid the hope and the glee.
And nought of all saw Volsung, as he dreamed of the coming glory,
And how the Kings of his kindred should fashion the round world's story.

So round about the Branstock they feast in the gleam of the gold;
And though the deeds of man-folk were not yet waxen old,
Yet had they tales for songcraft, and the blossomed garth of rhyme;
Tales of the framing of all things and the entering in of time
From the halls of the outer heaven; so near they knew the door.
Wherefore uprose a sea-king, and his hands that loved the oar
Now dealt with the rippling harp-gold, and he sang of the shaping of earth,
And how the stars were lighted, and where the winds had birth,
And the gleam of the first of summers on the yet untrodden grass.
But e'en as men's hearts were hearkening some heard the thunder pass
O'er the cloudless noontide heaven; and some men turned about
And deemed that in the doorway they heard a man laugh out.
Then into the Volsung dwelling a mighty man there strode,
One-eyed and seeming ancient, yet bright his visage glowed:
Cloud-blue was the hood upon him, and his kirtle gleaming-grey
As the latter morning sundog when the storm is on the way:
A bill he bore on his shoulder, whose mighty ashen beam
Burnt bright with the flame of the sea and the blended silver's gleam.
And such was the guise of his raiment as the Volsung elders had told
Was borne by their fathers' fathers, and the first that warred in the wold.

So strode he to the Branstock nor greeted any lord,
But forth from his cloudy raiment he drew a gleaming sword,
And smote it deep in the tree-bole, and the wild hawks overhead
Laughed 'neath the naked heaven as at last he spake and said:
"Earls of the Goths, and Volsungs, abiders on the earth,
Lo there amid the Branstock a blade of plenteous worth!
The folk of the war-wand's forgers wrought never better steel
Since first the burg of heaven uprose for man-folk's weal.
Now let the man among you whose heart and hand may shift
To pluck it from the oakwood e'en take it for my gift.
Then ne'er, but his own heart falter, its point and edge shall fail
Until the night's beginning and the ending of the tale.
Be merry Earls of the Goth-folk, O Volsung Sons be wise,

And reap the battle-acre that ripening for you lies:
For they told me in the wild wood, I heard on the mountain side,
That the shining house of heaven is wrought exceeding wide,
And that there the Early-comers shall have abundant rest
While Earth grows scant of great ones, and fadeth from its best,
And fadeth from its midward and groweth poor and vile:—
All hail to thee King Volsung! farewell for a little while!”
So sweet his speaking sounded, so wise his words did seem,
That moveless all men sat there, as in a happy dream
We stir not lest we waken; but there his speech had end,
And slowly down the hall-floor, and outward did he wend;
And none would cast him a question or follow on his ways,
For they knew that the gift was Odin’s, a sword for the world to praise.

But now spake Volsung the King: “Why sit ye silent and still?
Is the Battle-Father’s visage a token of terror and ill?
Arise O Volsung Children, Earls of the Goths arise,
And set your hands to the hilts as mighty men and wise!
Yet deem it not too easy; for belike a fateful blade
Lies there in the heart of the Branstock for a fated warrior made.”

Now therewith spake King Siggeir: “King Volsung give me a grace
To try it the first of all men, lest another win my place
And mere chance-hap steal my glory and the gain that I might win.”

Then somewhat laughed King Volsung, and he said: “O Guest, begin;
Though herein is the first as the last, for the Gods have long to live,
Nor hath Odin yet forgotten unto whom the gift he would give.”

Then forth to the tree went Siggeir, the Goth-folk’s mighty lord,
And laid his hand on the gemstones, and strained at the glorious sword
Till his heart grew black with anger; and never a word he said
As he wended back to the high-seat: but Signy waxed blood-red
When he sat him adown beside her; and her heart was nigh to break
For the shame and the fateful boding: and therewith King Volsung spake:

“Thus comes back empty-handed the mightiest King of Earth,
And how shall the feeble venture? yet each man knows his worth;
And today may a great beginning from a little seed upspring
To o’erpass many a great one that hath the name of King:
So stand forth free and unfree; stand forth both most and least:
But first ye Earls of the Goth-folk, ye lovely lords we feast.”

Upstood the Earls of Siggeir, and each man drew anigh
And deemed his time was coming for a glorious gain and high;
But for all their mighty shaping and their deeds in the battle-wood,
No looser in the Branstock that gift of Odin stood.
Then uprose Volsung’s homemen, and the fell-abiding folk;
And the yellow-headed shepherds came gathering round the Oak,
And the searchers of the thicket and the dealers with the oar:
And the least and the worst of them all was a mighty man of war.
But for all their mighty shaping, and the struggle and the strain
Of their hands, the deft in labour, they tugged thereat in vain;
And still as the shouting and jeers, and the names of men and the laughter
Beat backward from gable to gable, and rattled o’er roof-tree and rafter,
Moody and still sat Siggeir; for he said: “They have trained me here
As a mock for their woodland bondsmen; and yet shall they buy it dear.”

Now the tumult sank a little, and men cried on Volsung the King
And his sons, the hedge of battle, to try the fateful thing.

So Volsung laughed, and answered: "I will set me to the toil,
 Lest these my guests of the Goth-folk should deem I fear the foil.
 Yet nought am I ill-sworded, and the oldest friend is best;
 And this, my hand's first fellow, will I bear to the grave-mound's rest,
 Nor wield meanwhile another: Yea this shall I have in hand
 When mid the host of Odin in the Day of Doom I stand."

Therewith from his belt of battle he raised the golden sheath,
 And showed the peace-strings glittering about the hidden death:
 Then he laid his hand on the Branstock, and cried: "O tree beloved,
 I thank thee of thy good-heart that so little thou art moved:
 Abide thou thus, green bower, when I am dead and gone
 And the best of all my kindred a better day hath won!"

Then as a young man laughed he, and on the hilts of gold
 His hand, the battle-breaker, took fast and certain hold,
 And long he drew and strained him, but mended not the tale,
 Yet none the more thereover his mirth of heart did fail;
 But he wended to the high-seat and thence began to cry:

"Sons I have gotten and cherished, now stand ye forth to try;
 Lest Odin tell in God-home how from the way he strayed,
 And how to the man he would not he gave away his blade."
 So therewithal rose Rerir, and wasted might and main;
 Then Gunthiof, and then Hunthiof, they wearied them in vain;
 Nought was the might of Agnar; nought Helgi could avail;
 Sigi the tall and Solar no further brought the tale,
 Nor Geirmund the priest of the temple, nor Gylfi of the wood.

At last by the side of the Branstock Sigmund the Volsung stood,
 And with right hand wise in battle the precious sword-hilt caught,
 Yet in a careless fashion, as he deemed it all for nought:
 When lo, from floor to rafter went up a shattering shout,
 For aloft in the hand of Sigmund the naked blade shone out
 As high o'er his head he shook it: for the sword had come away
 From the grip of the heart of the Branstock, as though all loose it lay.
 A little while he stood there mid the glory of the hall,
 Like the best of the trees of the garden, when the April sunbeams fall
 On its blossomed boughs in the morning, and tell of the days to be;
 Then back unto the high-seat he wended soberly;
 For this was the thought within him; Belike the day shall come
 When I shall bide here lonely amid the Volsung home,
 Its glory and sole avenger, its after-summer seed.
 Yea, I am the hired of Odin, his workday will to speed,
 And the harvest-tide shall be heavy.—What then, were it come and past
 And I laid by the last of the sheaves with my wages earned at the last?

He lifted his eyes as he thought it, for now was he come to his place,
 And there he stood by his father and met Siggeir face to face,
 And he saw him blithe and smiling, and heard him how he spake:
 "O best of the sons of Volsung, I am merry for thy sake
 And the glory that thou hast gained us; but whereas thine hand and heart
 Are e'en now the lords of the battle, how lack'st thou for thy part
 A matter to better the best? Wilt thou overgild fine gold
 Or dye the red rose redder? So I prithee let me hold
 This sword that comes to thine hand on the day I wed thy kin.
 For at home have I a store-house; there is mountain-gold therein
 The weight of a war-king's harness; there is silver plenteous store;
 There is iron, and huge-wrought amber, that the southern men love sore,

When they sell me the woven wonder, the purple born of the sea;
And it hangeth up in that bower; and all this is a gift for thee:
But the sword that came to my wedding, methinketh it meet and right,
That it lie on my knees in the council and stead me in the fight."

But Sigmund laughed and answered, and he spake a scornful word:
"And if I take twice that treasure, will it buy me Odin's sword,
And the gift that the Gods have given? will it buy me again to stand
Betwixt two mightiest world-kings with a longed-for thing in mine hand
That all their might hath missed of? when the purple-selling men
Come buying thine iron and amber, dost thou sell thine honour then?
Do they wrap it in bast of the linden, or run it in moulds of earth?
And shalt thou account mine honour as a matter of lesser worth?
Came the sword to thy wedding, Goth-king, to thine hand it never came,
And thence is thine envy whetted to deal me this word of shame."

Black then was the heart of Siggeir, but his face grew pale and red,
Till he drew a smile thereover, and spake the word and said:
"Nay, pardon me, Signy's kinsman! when the heart desires o'ermuch
It teacheth the tongue ill speaking, and my word belike was such.
But the honour of thee and thy kindred, I hold it even as mine,
And I love you as my heart-blood, and take ye this for a sign.
I bid thee now King Volsung, and these thy glorious sons,
And thine earls and thy dukes of battle and all thy mighty ones,
To come to the house of the Goth-kings as honoured guests and dear
And abide the winter over; that the dusky days and drear
May be glorious with thy presence, that all folk may praise my life,
And the friends that my fame hath gotten; and that this my new-wed wife
Thine eyes may make the merrier till she bear my eldest born."
Then speedily answered Volsung: "No king of the earth might scorn
Such noble bidding, Siggeir; and surely will I come
To look upon thy glory and the Goths' abundant home.
But let two months wear over, for I have many a thing
To shape and shear in the Woodland, as befits a people's king:
And thou meanwhile here abiding of all my goods shalt be free,
And then shall we twain together roof over the glass-green sea
With the sides of our golden dragons; and our war-hosts' blended shields
Shall fright the sea-abiders and the folk of the fishy fields."

Answered the smooth-speeched Siggeir: "I thank thee well for this,
And thy bidding is most kingly; yet take it not amiss
That I wend my ways in the morning; for we Goth-folk know indeed
That the sea is a foe full deadly, and a friend that fails at need,
And that Ran who dwells thereunder will many a man beguile:
And I bear a woman with me; nor would I for a while
Behold that sea-queen's dwelling; for glad at heart am I
Of the realm of the Goths and the Volsungs, and I look for long to lie
In the arms of the fairest woman that ever a king may kiss.
So I go mine house to order for the increase of thy bliss,
That there in nought but joyance all we may wear the days
And that men of the time hereafter the more our lives may praise."

And for all the words of Volsung e'en so must the matter be,
And Siggeir the Goth and Signy on the morn shall sail the sea.
But the feast sped on the fairer, and the more they waxed in disport
And the glee that all men love, as they knew that the hours were short.
Yet a boding heart bare Sigmund amid his singing and laughter;
And somewhat Signy wotted of the deeds that were coming after;

For the wisest of women she was, and many a thing she knew;
 She would hearken the voice of the midnight till she heard what the Gods would do,
 And her feet fared oft on the wild, and deep was her communing
 With the heart of the glimmering woodland, where never a fowl may sing.
 So fair sped on the feasting amid the gleam of the gold,
 Amid the wine and the joyance; and many a tale was told
 To the harp-strings of that wedding, whereof the latter days
 Yet hold a little glimmer to wonder at and praise.
 Then the undark night drew over, and faint the high stars shone,
 And there on the beds blue-woven the slumber-tide they won;
 Yea while on the brightening mountain the herd-boy watched his sheep.
 Yet soft on the breast of Signy King Siggeir lay asleep.

How the Volsungs fared to the Land of the Goths, and of the fall of King Volsung.

Now or ever the sun shone houseward, unto King Volsung's bed
 Came Signy stealing barefoot, and she spake the word and said:
 "Awake and hearken, my father, for though the wedding be done,
 And I am the wife of the Goth-king, yet the Volsungs are not gone.
 So I come as a dream of the night, with a word that the Gods would say,
 And think thou thereof in the day-tide, and let Siggeir go on his way
 With me and the gifts and the gold, but do ye abide in the land,
 Nor trust in the guileful heart and the murder-loving hand,
 Lest the kin of the Volsungs perish, and the world be nothing worth."
 So came the word unto Volsung, and wit in his heart had birth;
 And he sat upright in the bed and kissed her on the lips;
 But he said: "My word is given, it is gone like the spring-tide ships:
 To death or to life must I journey when the months are come to an end.
 Yet my sons my words shall hearken, and shall nowise with me wend."
 Then she answered, speaking swiftly: "Nay, have thy sons with thee;
 Gather an host together and a mighty company,
 And meet the guile and the death-snare with battle and with wrack."
 He said: "Nay, my troth-word plighted e'en so should I draw aback:
 I shall go a guest, as my word was; of whom shall I be afraid?
 For an outworn elder's ending shall no mighty moan be made."
 Then answered Signy, weeping: "I shall see thee yet again
 When the battle thou arrayest on the Goth-folks' strand in vain.
 Heavy and hard are the Norns: but each man his burden bears;
 And what am I to fashion the fate of the coming years?"
 She wept and she wended back to the Goth-king's bolster blue,
 And Volsung pondered awhile till slumber over him drew;
 But when once more he wakened, the kingly house was up,
 And the homemen gathered together to drink the parting cup:
 And grand amid the hall-floor was the Goth king in his gear,
 And Signy clad for faring stood by the Branstock dear
 With the earls of the Goths about her: so queenly did she seem,
 So calm and ruddy coloured, that Volsung well might deem
 That her words were a fashion of slumber, a vision of the night.
 But they drank the wine of departing, and brought the horses dight,
 And forth abroad the Goth-folk and the Volsung Children rode,
 Nor ever once would Signy look back to that abode.
 So down over acre and heath they rode to the side of the sea,
 And there by the long-ships' bridges was the ship-host's company.

Then Signy kissed her brethren with ruddy mouth and warm,
Nor was there one of the Goth-folk but blessed her from all harm;
Then sweet she kissed her father and hung about his neck,
And sure she whispered him somewhat ere she passed forth toward the deck,
Though nought I know to tell it: then Siggeir hailed them fair,
And called forth many a blessing on the hearts that bode his snare.
Then were the gangways shipped, and blown was the parting horn,
And the striped sails drew with the wind, and away was Signy borne
White on the shielded long-ship, a grief in the heart of the gold;
Nor once would she turn her about the strand of her folk to behold.

Thenceforward dwelt the Volsungs in exceeding glorious state,
And merry lived King Volsung, abiding the day of his fate;
But when the months aforesaid were well-nigh worn away
To his sons and his folk of counsel he fell these words to say:
“Ye mind you of Signy’s wedding and of my plighted troth
To go in two months’ wearing to the house of Siggeir the Goth:
Nor will I hide how Signy then spake a warning word
And did me to wit that her husband was a grim and guileful lord,
And would draw us to our undoing for envy and despite
Concerning the Sword of Odin, and for dread of the Volsung might.
Now wise is Signy my daughter and knoweth nought but sooth:
Yet are there seasons and times when for longing and self-ruth
The hearts of women wander, and this maybe is such;
Nor for her word of Siggeir will I trow it overmuch,
Nor altogether doubt it, since the woman is wrought so wise;
Nor much might my heart love Siggeir for all his kingly guise.
Yet, shall a king hear murder when a king’s mouth blessing saith?
So maybe he is bidding me honour, and maybe he is bidding me death:
Let him do after his fashion, and I will do no less.
In peace will I go to his bidding let the spae-wrights ban or bless;
And no man now or hereafter of Volsung’s blenching shall tell.
But ye, sons, in the land shall tarry, and heed the realm right well,
Lest the Volsung Children fade, and the wide world worser grow.”

But with one voice cried all men, that they one and all would go
To gather the Goth-king’s honour, or let one fate go over all
If he bade them to battle and murder, till each by each should fall.
So spake the sons of his body, and the wise in wisdom and war.
Nor yet might it otherwise be, though Volsung bade full sore
That he go in some ship of the merchants with his life alone in his hand;
With such love he loved his kindred, and the people of his land.
But at last he said:

“So be it; for in vain I war with fate,
Who can raise up a king from the dunghill and make the feeble great.
We will go, a band of friends, and be merry whatever shall come,
And the Gods, mine own forefathers, shall take counsel of our home.”

So now, when all things were ready, in the first of the autumn tide
Adown unto the swan-bath the Volsung Children ride;
And lightly go a shipboard, a goodly company,
Though the tale thereof be scanty and their ships no more than three:
But kings’ sons dealt with the sail-sheets and earls and dukes of war
Were the halers of the hawsers and the tuggers at the oar.
So they drew the bridges shipward, and left the land behind,
And fair astern of the longships sprang up a following wind;
So swift o’er Ægir’s acre those mighty sailors ran,

And speedier than all other ploughed down the furrows wan.
 And they came to the land of the Goth-folk on the even of a day;
 And lo by the inmost skerry a skiff with a sail of grey
 That as they neared the foreshore ran Volsung's ship aboard,
 And there was come white-hand Signy with her latest warning word.
 "O strange," she said, "meseemeth, O sweet, your gear to see,
 And the well-loved Volsung faces, and the hands that cherished me.
 But short is the time that is left me for the work I have to win,
 Though nought it be but the speaking of a word ere the worst begin.
 For that which I spake aforetime, the seed of a boding drear,
 It hath sprung, it hath blossomed and born rank harvest of the spear;
 Siggeir hath dight the death-snare; he hath spread the shielded net.
 But ye come ere the hour appointed, and he looks not to meet you yet.
 Now blest be the wind that wafted your sails here over-soon,
 For thus have I won me seaward 'twixt the twilight and the moon,
 To pray you for all the world's sake turn back from the murderous shore.
 —Ah take me hence, my father, to see my land once more!"

Then sweetly Volsung kissed her: "Woe am I for thy sake,
 But earth the word hath hearkened, that yet unborn I spake;
 How I ne'er would turn me backward from the sword or the fire of bale;
 —I have held that word till today, and today shall I change the tale?
 And look on these thy brethren, how goodly and great are they,
 Wouldst thou have the maidens mock them, when this pain hath past away
 And they sit at the feast hereafter, that they feared the deadly stroke?
 Let us do our day's work deftly for the praise and the glory of folk;
 And if the Norns will have it that the Volsung kin shall fail,
 Yet I know of the deed that dies not, and the name that shall ever avail."

But she wept as one sick-hearted: "Woe's me for the hope of the morn!
 Yet send me not back unto Siggeir and the evil days and the scorn:
 Let me bide the death as ye bide it, and let a woman feel
 That hope of the death of battle and the rest of the foeman's steel."
 "Nay nay," he said, "go backward: this too thy fate will have;
 For thou art the wife of a king, and many a matter may'st save.
 Farewell! as the days win over, as sweet as a tale shall it grow,
 This day when our hearts were hardened; and our glory thou shalt know,
 And the love wherewith we loved thee mid the battle and the wrack."

She kissed them and departed, and mid the dusk fared back,
 And she sat that eve in the high-seat; and I deem that Siggeir knew
 The way that her feet had wended, and the deed she went to do:
 For the man was grim and guileful, and he knew that the snare was laid
 For the mountain bull unblenching and the lion unafraid.

But when the sun on the morrow shone over earth and sea
 Ashore went the Volsung Children a goodly company,
 And toward King Siggeir's dwelling o'er heath and holt they went
 But when they came to the topmost of a certain grassy bent,
 Lo there lay the land before them as thick with shield and spear
 As the rich man's wealthiest acre with the harvest of the year.
 There bade King Volsung tarry and dight the wedge-array;
 "For duly," he said, "doeth Siggeir to meet his guests by the way."
 So shield by shield they serried, nor ever hath been told
 Of any host of battle more glorious with the gold;
 And there stood the high King Volsung in the very front of war;
 And lovelier was his visage than ever heretofore.

As he rent apart the peace-strings that his brand of battle bound
And the bright blade gleamed to the heavens, and he cast the sheath to the ground.
Then up the steep came the Goth-folk, and the spear-wood drew anigh,
And earth's face shook beneath them, yet cried they never a cry;
And the Volsungs stood all silent, although forsooth at whiles
O'er the faces grown earth-weary would play the flickering smiles,
And swords would clink and rattle: not long had they to bide,
For soon that flood of murder flowed round the hillock-side;
Then at last the edges mingled, and if men forebore the shout,
Yet the din of steel and iron in the grey clouds rang about;
But how to tell of King Volsung, and the valour of his folk!
Three times the wood of battle before their edges broke;
And the shield-wall, sorely dwindled and reft of the ruddy gold,
Against the drift of the war-blast for the fourth time yet did hold.
But men's shields were waxen heavy with the weight of shafts they bore,
And the fifth time many a champion cast earthward Odin's door
And gripped the sword two-handed; and in sheaves the spears came on.
And at last the host of the Goth-folk within the shield-wall won,
And wild was the work within it, and oft and o'er again
Forth brake the sons of Volsung, and drave the foe in vain;
For the driven throng still thickened, till it might not give aback.
But fast abode King Volsung amid the shifting wrack
In the place where once was the forefront: for he said: "My feet are old,
And if I wend on further there is nought more to behold
Than this that I see about me."—Whiles drew his foes away
And stared across the corpses that before his sword-edge lay.
But nought he followed after: then needs must they in front
Thrust on by the thickening spear-throng come up to bear the brunt,
Till all his limbs were weary and his body rent and torn:
Then he cried: "Lo now, Allfather, is not the swathe well shorn?
Wouldst thou have me toil for ever, nor win the wages due?"
And mid the hedge of foemen his blunted sword he threw,
And, laid like the oars of a longship the level war-shafts pressed
On 'gainst the unshielded elder, and clashed amidst his breast,
And dead he fell, thrust backward, and rang on the dead men's gear:
But still for a certain season durst no man draw anear.
For 'twas e'en as a great God's slaying, and they feared the wrath of the sky;
And they deemed their hearts might harden if awhile they should let him lie.
Lo, now as the plotting was long, so short is the tale to tell
How a mighty people's leaders in the field of murder fell.
For but feebly burned the battle when Volsung fell to field,
And all who yet were living were borne down before the shield:
So sinketh the din and the tumult; and the earls of the Goths ring round
That crown of the Kings of battle laid low upon the ground,
Looking up to the noon-tide heavens from the place where first he stood:
But the songful sing above him and they tell how his end is as good
As the best of the days of his life-tide; and well as he was loved
By his friends ere the time of his changing, so now are his foemen moved
With a love that may never be worsened, since all the strife is o'er,
And the warders look for his coming by Odin's open door.
But his sons, the stay of battle, alive with many a wound,
Borne down to the earth by the shield-rush amid the dead lie bound,
And belike a wearier journey must those lords of battle bide
Ere once more in the Hall of Odin they sit by their father's side.

Woe's me for the boughs of the Branstock and the hawks that cried on the fight!
 Woe's me for the tireless hearthstones and the hangings of delight,
 That the women dare not look on lest they see them sweat with blood!
 Woe's me for the carven pillars where the spears of the Volsungs stood!
 And who next shall shake the locks, or the silver door-rings meet?
 Who shall pace the floor beloved, worn down by the Volsung feet?
 Who shall fill the gold with the wine, or cry for the triumphing?
 Shall it be kindred or foes, or thief, or thrall, or king?

Of the ending of all Volsung's Sons save Sigmund only, and of how he abideth in the wild wood.

So there the earls of the Goth-folk lay Volsung 'neath the grass
 On the last earth he had trodden; but his children bound must pass,
 When the host is gathered together, amidst of their array
 To the high-built dwelling of Siggeir; for sooth it is to say,
 That he came not into the battle, nor faced the Volsung sword.

So now as he sat in his high-seat there came his chiefest lord,
 And he said: "I bear thee tidings of the death of the best of the brave,
 For thy foes are slain or bondsmen; and have thou Sigmund's glaive,
 If a token thou desirest; and that shall be surely enough.
 And I do thee to wit, King Siggeir, that the road was exceeding rough,
 And that many an earl there stumbled, who shall evermore lie down.
 And indeed I deem King Volsung for all earthly kingship's crown."

Then never a word spake Siggeir, save: "Where be Volsung's sons?"
 And he said: "Without are they fettered, those battle-glorious ones:
 And methinks 'twere a deed for a king, and a noble deed for thee,
 To break their bonds and heal them, and send them back o'er the sea,
 And abide their wrath and the bloodfeud for this matter of Volsung's slaying:"

"Witless thou waxest," said Siggeir, "nor heedest the wise man's saying;
 'Slay thou the wolf by the house-door, lest he slay thee in the wood.'
 Yet since I am the overcomer, and my days henceforth shall be good,
 I will quell them with no death-pains; let the young men smite them down,
 But let me not behold them when my heart is angrier grown."

E'en as he uttered the word was Signy at the door,
 And with hurrying feet she gat her apace to the high-seat floor,
 As wan as the dawning-hour, though never a tear she had:
 And she cried: "I pray thee, Siggeir, now thine heart is merry and glad
 With the death and the bonds of my kinsmen, to grant me this one prayer,
 This one time and no other; let them breathe the earthly air
 For a day, for a day or twain, ere they wend the way of death,
 For 'sweet to eye while seen,' the elders' saying saith."

Quoth he: "Thou art mad with sorrow; wilt thou work thy friends this woe?
 When swift and untormented e'en I would let them go:
 Yet now shalt thou have thine asking, if it verily is thy will:
 Nor forsooth do I begrudge them a longer tide of ill."

She said: "I will it, I will it—O sweet to eye while seen!"

Then to his earl spake Siggeir: "There lies a wood-lawn green
 In the first mile of the forest; there fetter these Volsung men
 To the mightiest beam of the wild-wood, till Queen Signy come again
 And pray me a boon for her brethren, the end of their latter life."

So the Goth-folk led to the woodland those gleanings of the strife,
 And smote down a great-boled oak-tree, the mightiest they might find,
 And thereto with bonds of iron the Volsungs did they bind,

And left them there on the wood-lawn, mid the yew-trees' compassing,
And went back by the light of the moon to the dwelling of the king.
But he sent on the morn of the morrow to see how his foemen fared,
For now as he thought thereover, o'ermuch he deemed it dared
That he saw not the last of the Volsungs laid dead before his feet,
Back came his men ere the noontide, and he deemed their tidings sweet;
For they said: "We tell thee, King Siggeir, that Geirmund and Gylfi are gone.
And we deem that a beast of the wild-wood this murder grim hath done,
For the bones yet lie in the fetters gnawed fleshless now and white;
But we deemed the eight abiding sore minished of their might."
So wore the morn and the noontide, and the even 'gan to fall,
And watchful eyes held Signy at home in bower and hall.
And again came the men in the morning, and spake: "The hopples hold
The bare white bones of Helgi, and the bones of Solar the bold:
And the six that abide seem feebler than they were awhile ago."
Still all the day and the night-tide must Signy nurse her woe
About the house of King Siggeir, nor any might she send:
And again came the tale on the morrow: "Now are two more come to an end.
For Hunthiof dead and Gunthiof, their bones lie side by side,
And the four that are left, us seemeth, no long while will abide."
O woe for the well-watched Signy, how often on that day
Must she send her helpless eyen adown the woodland way!
Yet silent in her bosom she held her heart of flame.
And again on the morrow morning the tale was still the same:
"We tell thee now, King Siggeir, that all will soon be done;
For the two last men of the Volsungs, they sit there one by one,
And Sigi's head is drooping, but somewhat Sigmund sings;
For the man was a mighty warrior, and a beater down of kings.
But for Rerir and for Agnar, the last of them is said,
Their bones in the bonds are abiding, but their souls and lives are sped."
That day from the eyes of the watchers nought Signy strove to depart,
But ever she sat in the high-seat and nursed the flame in her heart.
In the sight of all people she sat, with unmoved face and wan,
And to no man gave she a word, nor looked on any man.
Then the dusk and the dark drew over, but stirred she never a whit,
And the word of Siggeir's sending, she gave no heed to it.
And there on the morrow morning must he sit him down by her side,
When unto the council of elders folk came from far and wide.
And there came Siggeir's woodmen, and their voice in the hall arose:
"There is no man left on the tree-beam: some beast hath devoured thy foes;
There is nought left there but the bones, and the bonds that the Volsungs bound."
No word spake the earls of the Goth-folk, but the hall rang out with a sound,
With the wail and the cry of Signy, as she stood upright on her feet,
And thrust all people from her, and fled to her bower as fleet
As the hind when she first is smitten; and her maidens fled away,
Fearing her face and her eyen: no less at the death of the day
She rose up amid the silence, and went her ways alone,
And no man watched her or hindered, for they deemed the story done.
So she went 'twixt the yellow acres, and the green meads of the sheep,
And or ever she reached the wild-wood the night was waxen deep
No man she had to lead her, but the path was trodden well
By those messengers of murder, the men with the tale to tell;
And the beams of the high white moon gave a glimmering day through night

Till she came where that lawn of the woods lay wide in the flood of light.
 Then she looked, and lo, in its midmost a mighty man there stood,
 And laboured the earth of the green-sward with a truncheon torn from the wood;
 And behold, it was Sigmund the Volsung; but she cried and had no fear:
 "If thou art living, Sigmund, what day's work dost thou here
 In the midnight and the forest? but if thou art nought but a ghost,
 Then where are those Volsung brethren, of whom thou wert best and most?"
 Then he turned about unto her, and his raiment was fouled and torn,
 And his eyes were great and hollow, as a famished man forlorn;
 But he cried: "Hail, Sister Signy! I looked for thee before,
 Though what should a woman compass, she one alone and no more,
 When all we shielded Volsungs did nought in Siggeir's land?
 O yea, I am living indeed, and this labour of mine hand
 Is to bury the bones of the Volsungs; and lo, it is well-nigh done.
 So draw near, Volsung's daughter, and pile we many a stone
 Where lie the grey wolf's gleanings of what was once so good."
 So she set her hand to the labour, and they toiled, they twain in the wood
 And when the work was over, dead night was beginning to fail:
 Then spake the white-hand Signy: "Now shalt thou tell the tale
 Of the death of the Volsung brethren ere the wood thy wrath shall hide,
 Ere I wend me back sick-hearted in the dwelling of kings to abide."
 He said: "We sat on the tree, and well ye may wot indeed
 That we had some hope from thy good-will amidst that bitter need.
 Now none had 'scaped the sword-edge in the battle utterly,
 And so hurt were Agnar and Helgi, that, unhelped, they were like to die;
 Though for that we deemed them happier: but now when the moon shone bright,
 And when by a doomed man's deeming 'twas the midmost of the night,
 Lo, forth from yonder thicket were two mighty wood-wolves come,
 Far huger wrought to my deeming than the beasts I knew at home:
 Fortright on Gylfi and Geirmund those dogs of the forest fell,
 And what of men so hopped should be the tale to tell?
 They tore them midst the irons, and slew them then and there,
 And long we heard them snarling o'er that abundant cheer.
 Night after night, O my sister, the story was the same,
 And still from the dark and the thicket the wild-wood were-wolves came
 And slew two men of the Volsungs whom the sword edge might not end.
 And every day in the dawning did the King's own woodmen wend
 To behold those craftsmen's carving and rejoice King Siggeir's heart.
 And so was come last midnight, when I must play my part:
 Forsooth when those first were murdered my heart was as blood and fire;
 And I deemed that my bonds must burst with my uttermost desire
 To free my naked hands, that the vengeance might be wrought;
 But now was I wroth with the Gods, that had made the Volsungs for nought
 And I said: in the Day of their Doom a man's help shall they miss;
 I will be as a wolf of the forest, if their kings must come to this;
 Or if Siggeir indeed be their king, and their envy has brought it about
 That dead in the dust lies Volsung, while the last of his seed dies out.
 Therewith from out the thicket the grey wolves drew anigh,
 And the he-wolf fell on Sigi, but he gave forth never a cry,
 And I saw his lips that they smiled, and his steady eyes for a space;
 And therewith was the she-wolf's muzzle thrust into my very face.
 The Gods helped not, but I helped; and I too grew wolfish then;
 Yea I, who have borne the sword-hilt high mid the kings of men,
 I, lord of the golden harness, the flame of the Glittering Heath,

Must snarl to the she-wolf's snarling, and snap with greedy teeth,
While my hands with the hand-bonds struggled; my teeth took hold the first
And amid her mighty writhing the bonds that bound me burst,
As with Fenrir's Wolf it shall be: then the beast with the hobbles I smote,
When my left hand stiff with the bonds had got her by the throat.
But I turned when I had slain her, and there lay Sigi dead,
And once more to the night of the forest the fretting wolf had fled.
In the thicket I hid till the dawning, and thence I saw the men,
E'en Siggeir's heart-rejoicers, come back to the place again
To gather the well-loved tidings: I looked and I knew for sooth
How hate had grown in my bosom and the death of my days of ruth:
Though unslain they departed from me, lest Siggeir come to doubt.
But hereafter, yea hereafter, they that turned the world about,
And raised Hell's abode o'er God-home, and mocked all men-folk's worth—
Shall my hand turn back or falter, while these abide on earth,
Because I once was a child, and sat on my father's knees;
But long methinks shall Siggeir bide merrily at ease
In the high-built house of the Goths, with his shielded earls around,
His warders of day and of night-tide, and his world of peopled ground,
While his foe is a swordless outcast, a hunted beast of the wood,
A wolf of the holy places, where men-folk gather for good.
And didst thou think, my sister, when we sat in our summer bliss
Beneath the boughs of the Branstock, that the world was like to this?"

As the moon and the twilight mingled, she stood with kindling eyes,
And answered and said: "My brother, thou art strong, and thou shalt be wise:
I am nothing so wroth as thou art with the ways of death and hell,
For thereof had I a deeming when all things were seeming well.
In sooth overlong it may linger; the children of murder shall thrive,
While thy work is a weight for thine heart, and a toil for thy hand to drive;
But I wot that the King of the Goth-folk for his deeds shall surely pay,
And that I shall live to see it: but thy wrath shall pass away,
And long shalt thou live on the earth an exceeding glorious king,
And thy words shall be told in the market, and all men of thy deeds shall sing:
Fresh shall thy memory be, and thine eyes like mine shall gaze
On the day unborn in the darkness, the last of all earthly days,
The last of the days of battle, when the host of the Gods is arrayed
And there is an end for ever of all who were once afraid.
There as thou drawest thy sword, thou shalt think of the days that were,
And the foul shall still seem foul, and the fair shall still seem fair;
But thy wit shall then be awakened, and thou shalt know indeed
Why the brave man's spear is broken, and his war-shield fails at need;
Why the loving is unbelovèd; why the just man falls from his state;
Why the liar gains in a day what the soothfast strives for late.
Yea, and thy deeds shalt thou know, and great shall thy gladness be;
As a picture all of gold thy life-days shalt thou see,
And know that thou too wert a God to abide through the hurry and haste;
A God in the golden hall, a God on the rain-swept waste,
A God in the battle triumphant, a God on the heap of the slain:
And thine hope shall arise and blossom, and thy love shall be quickened again:
And then shalt thou see before thee the face of all earthly ill;
Thou shalt drink of the cup of awakening that thine hand hath holpen to fill;
By the side of the sons of Odin shalt thou fashion a tale to be told
In the hall of the happy Baldur: nor there shall the tale grow old
Of the days before the changing, e'en those that over us pass.

So harden thine heart, O brother, and set thy brow as the brass!
 Thou shalt do, and thy deeds shall be goodly, and the day's work shall be done
 Though nought but the wild deer see it. Nor yet shalt thou be alone
 For ever-more in thy waiting; for belike a fearful friend
 The long days for thee may fashion, to help thee ere the end.
 But now shalt thou bide in the wild-wood, and make thee a lair therein:
 Thou art here in the midst of thy foemen, and from them thou well mayst win
 Whatso thine heart desireth; yet be thou not too bold,
 Lest the tale of the wood-abider too oft to the king be told.
 Ere many days are departed again shall I see thy face,
 That I may wot full surely of thine abiding-place
 To send thee help and comfort; but when that hour is o'er
 It were good, O last of the Volsungs, that I see thy face no more,
 If so indeed it may be: but the Norns must fashion all,
 And what the dawn hath fated on the hour of noon shall fall."
 Then she kissed him and departed, for the day was nigh at hand,
 And by then she had left the woodways green lay the horse-fed land
 Beneath the new-born daylight, and as she brushed the dew
 Betwixt the yellowing acres, all heaven o'erhead was blue.
 And at last on that dwelling of Kings the golden sunlight lay,
 And the morn and the noon and the even built up another day.

Of the birth and fostering of Sinfiotli, Signy's Son.

So wrought is the will of King Siggeir, and he weareth Odin's sword
 And it lies on his knees in the council and hath no other lord:
 And he sendeth earls o'er the sea-flood to take King Volsung's land,
 And those scattered and shepherdless sheep must come beneath his hand.
 And he holdeth the milk-white Signy as his handmaid and his wife.
 And nought but his will she doeth, nor raiseth a word of strife;
 So his heart is praising his wisdom, and he deems him of most avail
 Of all the lords of the cunning that teacheth how to prevail.
 Now again in a half-month's wearing goes Signy into the wild,
 And findeth her way by her wisdom to the dwelling of Volsung's child.
 It was e'en as a house of the Dwarfs, a rock, and a stony cave.
 In the heart of the midmost thicket by the hidden river's wave.
 There Signy found him watching how the white-head waters ran,
 And she said in her heart as she saw him that once more she had seen a man.
 His words were few and heavy, for seldom his sorrow slept,
 Yet ever his love went with them; and men say that Signy wept
 When she left that last of her kindred: yet wept she never more
 Amid the earls of Siggeir, and as lovely as before
 Was her face to all men's deeming: nor aught it changed for ruth,
 Nor for fear nor any longing; and no man said for sooth
 That she ever laughed thereafter till the day of her death was come.
 So is Volsung's seed abiding in a rough and narrow home;
 And wargear he gat him enough from the slaying of earls of men,
 And gold as much as he would; though indeed but now and again
 He fell on the men of the merchants, lest, wax he overbold,
 The tale of the wood-abider too oft to the king should be told.
 Alone in the woods he abided, and a master of masters was he
 In the craft of the smithying folk; and whiles would the hunter see,
 Belated amid the thicket, his forge's glimmering light,
 And the boldest of all the fishers would hear his hammer benight.

Then dim waxed the tale of the Volsungs, and the word mid the wood-folk rose
That a King of the Giants had wakened from amidst the stone-hedged close,
Where they slept in the heart of the mountains, and had come adown to dwell
In the cave whence the Dwarfs were departed, and they said: It is aught but well
To come anigh to his house-door, or wander wide in his woods?
For a tyrannous lord he is, and a lover of gold and of goods.

So win the long years over, and still sitteth Signy there
Beside the King of the Goth-folk, and is waxen no less fair,
And men and maids hath she gotten who are ready to work her will,
For the worship of her fairness, and remembrance of her ill.

So it fell on a morn of springtide, as Sigmund sat on the sward
By that ancient house of the Dwarf-kind and fashioned a golden sword?
By the side of the hidden river he saw a damsel stand,
And a manchild of ten summers was holding by her hand.

And she cried:

“O Forest-dweller! harm not the child nor me,
For I bear a word of Signy’s, and thus she saith to thee:
’I send thee a man to foster; if his heart be good at need
Then may he help thy workday; but hearken my words and heed;
If thou deem that his heart shall avail not, thy work is over-great
That thou weary thy heart with such-like: let him wend the ways of his fate.”

And no more word spake the maiden, but turned and gat her gone,
And there by the side of the river the child abode alone:
But Sigmund stood on his feet, and across the river he went.
For he knew how the child was Siggeir’s, and of Signy’s fell intent.
So he took the lad on his shoulder, and bade him hold his sword,
And waded back to his dwelling across the rushing ford:
But the youngling fell a prattling, and asked of this and that,
As above the rattle of waters on Sigmund’s shoulder he sat!
And Sigmund deemed in his heart that the boy would be bold enough.
So he fostered him there in the woodland in life full hard and rough
For the space of three months’ wearing; and the lad was deft and strong,
Yet his sight was a grief to Sigmund because of his father’s wrong.

On a morn to the son of King Siggeir Sigmund the Volsung said:

“I go to the hunting of deer, bide thou and bake our bread
Against I bring the venison.”

So forth he fared on his way,

And came again with the quarry about the noon of day;

Quoth he: “Is the morn’s work done?” But the boy said nought for a space,
And all white he was and quaking as he looked on Sigmund’s face.

“Tell me, O Son of the Goth-king,” quoth Sigmund, “how thou hast fared?
Forsooth, is the baking of bread so mighty a thing to be dared?”

Quoth the lad: “I went to the meal-sack, and therein was something quick,
And it moved, and I feared for the serpent, like a winter ashen stick
That I saw on the stone last even: so I durst not deal with the thing.”

Loud Sigmund laughed, and answered: “I have heard of that son of a king,
Who might not be scared from his bread for all the worms of the land.”

And therewith he went to the meal-sack and thrust therein his hand,
And drew forth an ash-grey adder, and a deadly worm it was:

Then he went to the door of the cave and set it down in the grass,

While the King’s son quaked and quivered: then he drew forth his sword from the sheath,
And said:

“Now fearest thou this, that men call the serpent of death?”

Then said the son of King Siggeir: "I am young as yet for the war,
 Yet e'en such a blade shall I carry ere many a month be o'er."
 Then abroad went the King in the wind, and leaned on his naked sword
 And stood there many an hour, and mused on Signy's word.
 But at last when the moon was arisen, and the undark night begun,
 He sheathed the sword and cried: "Come forth, King Siggeir's son,
 Thou shalt wend from out of the wild-wood and no more will I foster thee."

Forth came the son of Siggeir, and quaked his face to see,
 But thereof nought Sigmund noted, but bade him wend with him.
 So they went through the summer night-tide by many a wood-way dim,
 Till they came to a certain wood-lawn, and Sigmund lingered there,
 And spake as his feet brushed o'er it: "The June flowers blossom fair."
 So they came to the skirts of the forest, and the meadows of the neat,
 And the earliest wind of dawning blew over them soft and sweet:

There stayed Sigmund the Volsung, and said:

"King Siggeir's son,

Bide here till the birds are singing, and the day is well begun;
 Then go to the house of the Goth-king, and find thou Signy the Queen,
 And tell unto no man else the things thou hast heard and seen:
 But to her shalt thou tell what thou wilt, and say this word withal:
 'Mother, I come from the wild-wood, and he saith, whatever befall
 Alone will I abide there, nor have such fosterlings;
 For the sons of the Gods may help me, but never the sons of Kings.'
 Go, then, with this word in thy mouth—or do thou after thy fate,
 And, if thou wilt, betray me!—and repent it early and late."

Then he turned his back on the acres, and away to the woodland strode;
 But the boy scarce bided the sunrise ere he went the homeward road;
 So he came to the house of the Goth-kings, and spake with Signy the Queen,
 Nor told he to any other the things he had heard and seen,
 For the heart of a king's son had he.

But Signy hearkened his word;

And long she pondered and said: "What is it my heart hath feared?
 And how shall it be with earth's people if the kin of the Volsungs die,
 And King Volsung unavenged in his mound by the sea-strand lie?
 I have given my best and bravest, as my heart's blood I would give,
 And my heart and my fame and my body, that the name of Volsung might live.
 Lo the first gift cast aback: and how shall it be with the last,—
 —If I find out the gift for the giving before the hour be passed?"

Long while she mused and pondered while day was thrust on day,
 Till the king and the earls of the strangers seemed shades of the dreamtide grey
 And gone seemed all earth's people, save that woman mid the gold
 And that man in the depths of the forest in the cave of the Dwarfs of old.
 And once in the dark she murmured: "Where then was the ancient song
 That the Gods were but twin-born once, and deemed it nothing wrong
 To mingle for the world's sake, whence had the Æsir birth,
 And the Vanir and the Dwarf-kind, and all the folk of earth?"

Now amidst those days that she pondered came a wife of the witch-folk there,
 A woman young and lovesome, and shaped exceeding fair,
 And she spake with Signy the Queen, and told her of deeds of her craft,
 And how the might was with her her soul from her body to waft
 And to take the shape of another and give her fashion in turn.
 Fierce then in the heart of Signy a sudden flame 'gan burn,
 And the eyes of her soul saw all things, like the blind, whom the world's last fire
 Hath healed in one passing moment 'twixt his death and his desire.

And she thought: "Alone I will bear it; alone I will take the crime;
On me alone be the shaming, and the cry of the coming time.
Yea, and he for the life is fated and the help of many a folk,
And I for the death and the rest, and deliverance from the yoke."

Then wan as the midnight moon she answered the woman and spake:
"Thou art come to the Goth-queen's dwelling, wilt thou do so much for my sake,
And for many a pound of silver and for rings of the ruddy gold,
As to change thy body for mine ere the night is waxen old?"

Nought the witch-wife fair gainsaid it, and they went to the bower aloft
And hand in hand and alone they sung the spell-song soft:
Till Signy looked on her guest, and lo, the face of a queen
With the steadfast eyes of grey, that so many a grief had seen:
But the guest held forth a mirror, and Signy shrank aback
From the laughing lips and the eyes, and the hair of crispy black,
But though she shuddered and sickened, the false face changed no whit;
But ruddy and white it blossomed and the smiles played over it;
And the hands were ready to cling, and beckoning lamps were the eyes,
And the light feet longed for the dance, and the lips for laughter and lies.

So that eve in the mid-hall's high-seat was the shape of Signy the Queen,
While swiftly the feet of the witch-wife brushed over the moonlit green,
But the soul mid the gleam of the torches, her thought was of gain and of gold;
And the soul of the wind-driven woman, swift-foot in the moonlight cold,
Her thoughts were of men's lives' changing, and the uttermost ending of earth,
And the day when death should be dead, and the new sun's nightless birth.

Men say that about that midnight King Sigmund wakened and heard
The voice of a soft-speeched woman, shrill-sweet as a dawning bird;
So he rose, and a woman indeed he saw by the door of the cave
With her raiment wet to her midmost, as though with the river-wave:
And he cried: "What wilt thou, what wilt thou? be thou womankind or fay,
Here is no good abiding, wend forth upon thy way!"

She said: "I am nought but a woman, a maid of the earl-folk's kin:
And I went by the skirts of the woodland to the house of my sister to win,
And have strayed from the way benighted: and I fear the wolves and the wild
By the glimmering of thy torchlight from afar was I beguiled.
Ah, slay me not on thy threshold, nor send me back again
Through the rattling waves of thy ford, that I crossed in terror and pain;
Drive me not to the night and the darkness, for the wolves of the wood to devour.
I am weak and thou art mighty: I will go at the dawning hour."

So Sigmund looked in her face and saw that she was fair;
And he said: "Nay, nought will I harm thee, and thou mayst harbour here,
God wot if thou fear'st not me, I have nought to fear thy face:
Though this house be the terror of men-folk, thou shalt find it as safe a place
As though I were nought but thy brother; and then mayst thou tell, if thou wilt,
Where dwelleth the dread of the woodland, the bearer of many a guilt,
Though meseems for so goodly a woman it were all too ill a deed
In reward for the wood-wight's guesting to betray him in his need."

So he took the hand of the woman and straightway led her in
Where days ago the Dwarf-kind would their deeds of smithying win:
And he kindled the half-slaked embers, and gave her of his cheer
Amid the gold and the silver, and the fight-won raiment dear;
And soft was her voice, and she sung him sweet tales of yore ago,
Till all his heart was softened; and the man was all alone,
And in many wise she wooed him; so they parted not that night,

Nor slept till the morrow morning, when the woods were waxen bright:
And high above the tree-boughs shone the sister of the moon,
And hushed were the water-ouzes with the coming of the noon
When she stepped from the bed of Sigmund, and left the Dwarf's abode;
And turned to the dwellings of men, and the ways where the earl-folk rode.
But next morn from the house of the Goth-king the witch-wife went her ways
With gold and goods and silver, such store as a queen might praise.
But no long while with Sigmund dwelt remembrance of that night;
Amid his kingly longings and his many deeds of might
It fled like the dove in the forest or the down upon the blast:
Yet heavy and sad were the years, that even in suchwise passed,
As here it is written aforetime.
Thence were ten years worn by
When unto that hidden river a man-child drew anigh,
And he looked and beheld how Sigmund wrought on a helm of gold
By the crag and the stony dwelling where the Dwarf-kin wrought of old.
Then the boy cried: "Thou art the wood-wight of whom my mother spake;
Now will I come to thy dwelling."
So the rough stream did he take,
And the welter of the waters rose up to his chin and more;
But so stark and strong he waded that he won the further shore:
And he came and gazed on Sigmund: but the Volsung laughed, and said:
"As fast thou runnest toward me as others in their dread
Run over the land and the water: what wilt thou, son of a king?"
But the lad still gazed on Sigmund, and he said: "A wondrous thing!
Here is the cave and the river, and all tokens of the place:
But my mother Signy told me none might behold that face,
And keep his flesh from quaking: but at thee I quake not aught:
Sure I must journey further, lest her errand come to nought:
Yet I would that my foster-father should be such a man as thou."
But Sigmund answered and said: "Thou shalt bide in my dwelling now;
And thou mayst wot full surely that thy mother's will is done
By this token and no other, that thou lookedst on Volsung's son
And smiledst fair in his face: but tell me thy name and thy years:
And what are the words of Signy that the son of the Goth-king bears?"
"Sinfiotli they call me," he said, "and ten summers have I seen;
And this is the only word that I bear from Signy the Queen,
That once more a man she sendeth the work of thine hands to speed,
If he be of the Kings or the Gods thyself shalt know in thy need."
So Sigmund looked on the youngling and his heart unto him yearned;
But he thought: "Shall I pay the hire ere the worth of the work be earned?
And what hath my heart to do to cherish Siggeir's son;
A brand belike for the burning when the last of its work is done?"
But there in the wild and the thicket those twain awhile abode,
And on the lad laid Sigmund full many a weary load,
And thrust him mid all dangers, and he bore all passing well,
Where hardihood might help him; but his heart was fierce and fell;
And ever said Sigmund the Volsung: The lad hath plenteous part
In the guile and malice of Siggeir, and in Signy's hardy heart:
But why should I cherish and love him, since the end must come at last?
Now a summer and winter and spring o'er those men of the wilds had pass'd.
And summer was there again, when the Volsung spake on a day:

"I will wend to the wood-deer's hunting, but thou at home shalt stay,
And deal with the baking of bread against the even come."

So he went and came on the hunting and brought the venison home,
And the child, as ever his wont was, was glad of his coming back,
And said: "Thou hast gotten us venison, and the bread shall nowise lack."

"Yea," quoth Sigmund the Volsung, "hast thou kneaded the meal that was yonder?"

"Yea, and what other?" he said; "though therein forsooth was a wonder:

For when I would handle the meal-sack therein was something quick,
As if the life of an eel-grig were set in an ashen stick:

But the meal must into the oven, since we were lacking bread,
And all that is kneaded together, and the wonder is baked and dead."

Then Sigmund laughed and answered: "Thou hast kneaded up therein
The deadliest of all adders that is of the creeping kin:

So tonight from the bread refrain thee, lest thy bane should come of it."

For here, the tale of the elders doth men a marvel to wit,
That such was the shaping of Sigmund among all earthly kings,
That unhurt he handled adders and other deadly things,
And might drink unscathed of venom: but Sinfiotli so was wrought,
That no sting of creeping creatures would harm his body aught.

But now full glad was Sigmund, and he let his love arise
For the huge-limbed son of Signy with the fierce and eager eyes;
And all deeds of the sword he learned him, and showed him feats of war
Where sea and forest mingle, and up from the ocean's shore
The highway leads to the market, and men go up and down,
And the spear-hedged wains of the merchants fare oft to the Goth-folk's town.
Sweet then Sinfiotli deemed it to look on the bale-fires' light,
And the bickering blood-reeds' tangle, and the fallow blades of fight.
And in three years' space were his war-deeds far more than the deeds of a man:
But dread was his face to behold ere the battle-play began,
And grey and dreadful his face when the last of the battle sank.
And so the years won over, and the joy of the woods they drank,
And they gathered gold and silver, and plenteous outland goods.

But they came to a house on a day in the uttermost part of the woods
And smote on the door and entered, when a long while no man bade;
And lo, a gold-hung hall, and two men on the benches laid
In slumber as deep as the death; and gold rings great and fair
Those sleepers bore on their bodies, and brodered southland gear,
And over the head of each there hung a wolf-skin grey.

Then the drift of a cloudy dream wrapt Sigmund's soul away,
And his eyes were set on the wolf-skin, and long he gazed thereat,
And remembered the words he uttered when erst on the beam he sat,
That the Gods should miss a man in the utmost Day of Doom,
And win a wolf in his stead; and unto his heart came home
That thought, as he gazed on the wolf-skin and the other days waxed dim,
And he gathered the thing in his hand, and did it over him;
And in likewise did Sinfiotli as he saw his fosterer do.

Then lo, a fearful wonder, for as very wolves they grew
In outward shape and semblance, and they howled out wolfish things,
Like the grey dogs of the forest; though somewhat the hearts of kings
Abode in their bodies of beasts. Now sooth is the tale to tell,
That the men in the fair-wrought raiment were kings' sons bound by a spell
To wend as wolves of the wild-wood, for each nine days of the ten,
And to lie all spent for a season when they gat their shapes of men.

So Sigmund and his fellow rush forth from the golden place;
And though their kings' hearts bade them the backward way to trace
Unto their Dwarf-wrought dwelling, and there abide the change,
Yet their wolfish habit drave them wide through the wood to range,
And draw nigh to the dwellings of men and fly upon the prey.

And lo now, a band of hunters on the uttermost woodland way,
And they spy those dogs of the forest, and fall on with the spear,
Nor deemed that any other but woodland beasts they were,
And that easy would be the battle: short is the tale to tell;
For every man of the hunters amid the thicket fell.

Then onwards fare those were-wolves, and unto the sea they turn,
And their ravening hearts are heavy, and sore for the prey they yearn:
And lo, in the last of the thicket a score of the chaffering men,
And Sinfiotli was wild for the onset, but Sigmund was wearying then
For the glimmering gold of his Dwarf-house, and he bade refrain from the folk,
But wrath burned in the eyes of Sinfiotli, and forth from the thicket he broke;
Then rose the axes aloft, and the swords flashed bright in the sun,
And but little more it needed that the race of the Volsungs was done,
And the folk of the Gods' begetting; but at last they quelled the war,
And no man again of the sea-folk should ever sit by the oar.

Now Sinfiotli lay weary and faint, but Sigmund howled over the dead,
And wrath in his heart there gathered, and a dim thought wearied his head
And his tangled wolfish wit, that might never understand;
As though some God in his dreaming had wasted the work of his hand,
And forgotten his craft of creation; then his wrath swelled up amain
And he turned and fell on Sinfiotli, who had wrought the wrack and the bane
And across the throat he tore him as his very mortal foe
Till a cold dead corpse by the sea-strand his fosterling lay alow:
Then wearier yet grew Sigmund, and the dim wit seemed to pass
From his heart grown cold and feeble; when lo, amid the grass
There came two weazles bickering, and one bit his mate by the head,
Till she lay there dead before him: then he sorrowed over her dead:
But no long while he abode there, but into the thicket he went,
And the wolfish heart of Sigmund knew somewhat his intent:
So he came again with a herb-leaf and laid it on his mate,
And she rose up whole and living and no worser of estate
Than ever she was aforetime, and the twain went merry away.

Then swiftly rose up Sigmund from where his fosterling lay,
And a long while searched the thicket, till that three-leaved herb he found,
And he laid it on Sinfiotli, who rose up hale and sound
As ever he was in his life-days. But now in hate they had
That hapless work of the witch-folk, and the skins that their bodies clad.
So they turn their faces homeward and a weary way they go,
Till they come to the hidden river, and the glimmering house they know.

There now they abide in peace, and wend abroad no more
Till the last of the nine days perished, and the spell for a space was o'er,
And they might cast their wolf-shapes: so they stood on their feet upright
Great men again as aforetime, and they came forth into the light
And looked in each other's faces, and belike a change was there
Since they did on the bodies of wolves, and lay in the wood-wolves' lair,
And they looked, and sore they wondered, and they both for speech did yearn.

First then spake out Sinfiotli: "Sure I had a craft to learn,
And thou hadst a lesson to teach, that I left the dwelling of kings,

And came to the wood-wolves' dwelling; thou hast taught me many things
 But the Gods have taught me more, and at last have abased us both,
 That of nought that lieth before us our hearts and our hands may be loth.
 Come then, how long shall I tarry till I fashion something great?
 Come, Master, and make me a master that I do the deeds of fate."

Heavy was Sigmund's visage but fierce did his eyen glow,
 "This is the deed of thy mastery;—we twain shall slay my foe—
 And how if the foe were thy father?"—
 Then he telleth him Siggeir's tale:
 And saith: "Now think upon it; how shall thine heart avail
 To bear the curse that cometh if thy life endureth long—
 The man that slew his father and amended wrong with wrong?
 Yet if the Gods have made thee a man unlike all men,
 (For thou startest not, nor palest), can I forbear it then,
 To use the thing they have fashioned lest the Volsung seed should die
 And unavenged King Volsung in his mound by the sea-strand lie?"

Then loud laughed out Sinfiotli, and he said: "I wot indeed
 That Signy is my mother, and her will I help at need:
 Is the fox of the King-folk my father, that adder of the brake,
 Who gave me never a blessing, and many a cursing spake?
 Yea, have I in sooth a father, save him that cherished my life,
 The Lord of the Helm of Terror, the King of the Flame of Strife?
 Lo now my hand is ready to strike what stroke thou wilt,
 For I am the sword of the Gods: and thine hand shall hold the hilt."

Fierce glowed the eyes of King Sigmund, for he knew the time was come
 When the curse King Siggeir fashioned at last shall seek him home:
 And of what shall follow after, be it evil days, or bliss,
 Or praise, or the cursing of all men,—the Gods shall see to this.

Of the slaying of Siggeir the Goth-king.

So there are those kings abiding, and they think of nought but the day
 When the time at last shall serve them, to wend on the perilous way.
 And so in the first of winter, when nights grow long and mirk,
 They fare unto Siggeir's dwelling and seek wherein to lurk.
 And by hap 'twas the tide of twilight, ere the watch of the night was set
 And the watch of the day was departed, as Sinfiotli minded yet
 So now by a passage he wotted they gat them into the bower
 Where lay the biggest wine-tuns, and there they abode the hour:
 Anigh to the hall it was, but no man came thereto,
 But now and again the cup-lord when King Siggeir's wine he drew:
 Yea and so nigh to the feast-hall, that they saw the torches shine
 When the cup-lord was departed with King Siggeir's dear-bought wine,
 And they heard the glee of the people, and the horns and the beakers' din,
 When the feast was dight in the hall and the earls were merry therein.
 Calm was the face of Sigmund, and clear were his eyes and bright;
 But Sinfiotli gnawed on his shield-rim, and his face was haggard and white:
 For he deemed the time full long, ere the fallow blades should leap
 In the hush of the midnight feast-hall o'er King Siggeir's golden sleep.

Now it fell that two little children, Queen Signy's youngest-born,
 Were about the hall that even, and amid the glee of the horn
 They played with a golden toy, and trundled it here and there,
 And thus to that lurking-bower they drew exceeding near,
 When there fell a ring from their toy, and swiftly rolled away

And into the place of the wine-tuns, and by Sigmund's feet made stay;
 Then the little ones followed after, and came to the lurking-place
 Where lay those night-abiders, and met them face to face,
 And fled, ere they might hold them, aback to the thronging hall.

Then leapt those twain to their feet lest the sword and the murder fall
 On their hearts in their narrow lair and they die without a stroke;
 But e'en as they met the torch-light and the din and tumult of folk,
 Lo there on the very threshold did Signy the Volsung stand,
 And one of her last-born children she had on either hand;
 For the children had cried: "We have seen them—those two among the wine,
 And their hats are wide and white, and their garments tinkle and shine."
 So while men ran to their weapons, those children Signy took,
 And went to meet her kinsmen: then once more did Sigmund look
 On the face of his father's daughter, and kind of heart he grew,
 As the clash of the coming battle anigh the doomed men drew:
 But wan and fell was Signy; and she cried:
 "The end is near!

—And thou with the smile on thy face and the joyful eyes and clear!
 But with these thy two betrayers first stain the edge of fight,
 For why should the fruit of my body outlive my soul tonight?"

But he cried in the front of the spear-hedge; "Nay this shall be far from me
 To slay thy children sackless, though my death belike they be.
 Now men will be dealing, sister, and old the night is grown,
 And fair in the house of my fathers the benches are bestrown."

So she stood aside and gazed: but Sinfiotli taketh them up
 And breaketh each tender body as a drunkard breaketh a cup;
 With a dreadful voice he crieth, and casteth them down the hall,
 And the Goth-folk sunder before them, and at Siggeir's feet they fall.

But the fallow blades leapt naked, and on the battle came,
 As the tide of the winter ocean sweeps up to the beaconing flame.
 But firm in the midst of onset Sigmund the Volsung stood,
 And stirred no more for the sword-strokes than the oldest oak of the wood
 Shall shake to the herd-boys' whittles: white danced his war-flame's gleam,
 And oft to men's beholding his eyes of God would beam
 Clear from the sword-blades' tangle, and often for a space
 Amazed the garth of murder stared deedless on his face;
 Nor back nor forward moved he: but fierce Sinfiotli went
 Where the spears were set the thickest, and sword with sword was blent;
 And great was the death before him, till he slipped in the blood and fell:
 Then the shield-garth compassed Sigmund, and short is the tale to tell;
 For they bore him down unwounded, and bonds about him cast:
 Nor sore hurt is Sinfiotli, but is hopped strait and fast.

Then the Goth-folk went to slumber when the hall was washed from blood:
 But a long while wakened Siggeir, for fell and fierce was his mood,
 And all the days of his kingship seemed nothing worth as then
 While fared the son of Volsung as well as the worst of men,
 While yet that son of Signy lay untormented there:
 Yea the past days of his kingship seemed blossomless and bare
 Since all their might had failed him to quench the Volsung kin.

So when the first grey dawning a new day did begin,
 King Siggeir bade his bondsmen to dight an earthen mound
 Anigh to the house of the Goth-kings amid the fruit-grown ground:
 And that house of death was twofold, for 'twas sundered by a stone

Into two woeful chambers: alone and not alone
Those vanquished thralls of battle therein should bide their hour,
That each might hear the tidings of the other's baleful bower,
Yet have no might to help him. So now the twain they brought
And weary-dull was Sinfiotli, with eyes that looked at nought.
But Sigmund fresh and clear-eyed went to the deadly hall,
And the song arose within him as he sat within its wall;
Nor aught durst Siggeir mock him, as he had good will to do,
But went his ways when the bondmen brought the roofing turfs thereto.

And that was at eve of the day; and lo now, Signy the white
Wan-faced and eager-eyed stole through the beginning of night
To the place where the builders built, and the thralls with lingering hands
Had roofed in the grave of Sigmund and hidden the glory of lands,
But over the head of Sinfiotli for a space were the rafters bare.
Gold then to the thralls she gave, and promised them days full fair
If they held their peace for ever of the deed that then she did:
And nothing they gainsayed it; so she drew forth something hid,
In wrappings of wheat-straw winded, and into Sinfiotli's place
She cast it all down swiftly; then she covereth up her face
And beneath the winter starlight she wended swift away.
But her gift do the thralls deem victual, and the thatch on the hall they lay,
And depart, they too, to their slumber, now dight was the dwelling of death.

Then Sigmund hears Sinfiotli, how he cries through the stone and saith:
"Best unto babe is mother, well sayeth the elder's saw;
Here hath Signy sent me swine's-flesh in windings of wheaten straw."

And again he held him silent of bitter words or of sweet;
And quoth Sigmund, "What hath betided? is an adder in the meat?"
Then loud his fosterling laughed: "Yea, a worm of bitter tooth,
The serpent of the Branstock, the sword of thy days of youth!
I have felt the hilts aforetime; I have felt how the letters run
On each side of the trench of blood and the point of that glorious one.
O mother, O mother of kings! we shall live and our days shall be sweet!
I have loved thee well aforetime, I shall love thee more when we meet."

Then Sigmund heard the sword-point smite on the stone wall's side,
And slowly mid the darkness therethrough he heard it gride
As against it bore Sinfiotli: but he cried out at the last:
"It biteth, O my fosterer! It cleaves the earth-bone fast!
Now learn we the craft of the masons that another day may come
When we build a house for King Siggeir, a strait unlovely home."

Then in the grave-mound's darkness did Sigmund the king upstand;
And unto that saw of battle he set his naked hand;
And hard the gift of Odin home to their breasts they drew;
Sawed Sigmund, sawed Sinfiotli, till the stone was cleft atwo,
And they met and kissed together: then they hewed and heaved full hard
Till lo, through the bursten rafters the winter heavens bestarred!
And they leap out merry-hearted; nor is there need to say
A many words between them of whither was the way.

For they took the night-watch sleeping, and slew them one and all
And then on the winter fagots they made them haste to fall,
They pile the oak-trees cloven, and when the oak-beams fail
They bear the ash and the rowan, and build a mighty bale
About the dwelling of Siggeir, and lay the torch therein.
Then they drew their swords and watched it till the flames began to win

Hard on to the mid-hall's rafters, and those feasters of the folk,
 As the fire-flakes fell among them, to their last of days awoke.
 By the gable-door stood Sigmund, and fierce Sinfiotli stood
 Red-lit by the door of the women in the lane of blazing wood:
 To death each doorway opened, and death was in the hall.

Then amid the gathered Goth-folk 'gan Siggeir the king to call:
 "Who lit the fire I burn in, and what shall buy me peace?
 Will ye take my heaped-up treasure, or ten years of my fields' increase,
 Or half of my father's kingdom? O toilers at the oar,
 O wasters of the sea-plain, now labour ye no more!
 But take the gifts I bid you, and lie upon the gold,
 And clothe your limbs in purple and the silken women hold!"

But a great voice cried o'er the fire: "Nay, no such men are we,
 No tuggers at the hawser, no wasters of the sea:
 We will have the gold and the purple when we list such things to win
 But now we think on our fathers, and avenging of our kin.
 Not all King Siggeir's kingdom, and not all the world's increase
 For ever and for ever, shall buy thee life and peace.
 For now is the tree-bough blossomed that sprang from murder's seed;
 And the death-doomed and the buried are they that do the deed;
 Now when the dead shall ask thee by whom thy days were done,
 Thou shalt say by Sigmund the Volsung, and Sinfiotli, Signy's son."

Then stark fear fell on the earl-folk, and silent they abide
 Amid the flaming penfold; and again the great voice cried,
 As the Goth-king's golden pillars grew red amidst the blaze:
 "Ye women of the Goth-folk, come forth upon your ways;
 And thou, Signy, O my sister, come forth from death and hell,
 That beneath the boughs of the Branstock once more we twain may dwell."

Forth came the white-faced women and passed Sinfiotli's sword,
 Free by the glaive of Odin the trembling pale ones poured,
 But amid their hurrying terror came never Signy's feet;
 And the pearls of the throne of Siggeir shrunk in the fervent heat.

Then the men of war surged outward to the twofold doors of bane,
 But there played the sword of Sigmund amidst the fiery lane
 Before the gable door-way, and by the woman's door
 Sinfiotli sang to the sword-edge amid the bale-fire's roar,
 And back again to the burning the earls of the Goth-folk shrank:
 And the light low licked the tables, and the wine of Siggeir drank.

Lo now to the woman's doorway, the steel-watched bower of flame,
 Clad in her queenly raiment King Volsung's daughter came
 Before Sinfiotli's sword-point; and she said: "O mightiest son,
 Best now is our departing in the day my grief hath won,
 And the many days of toiling, and the travail of my womb,
 And the hate, and the fire of longing: thou, son, and this day of the doom
 Have long been as one to my heart; and now shall I leave you both,
 And well ye may wot of the slumber my heart is nothing loth;
 And all the more, as, meseemeth, thy day shall not be long
 To weary thee with labour and mingle wrong with wrong.
 Yea, and I wot that the daylight thine eyes had never seen
 Save for a great king's murder and the shame of a mighty queen.
 But let thy soul, I charge thee, o'er all these things prevail
 To make thy short day glorious and leave a goodly tale."

She kissed him and departed, and unto Sigmund went
 As now against the dawning grey grew the winter bent:
 As the night and the morning mingled he saw her face once more,
 And he deemed it fair and ruddy as in the days of yore;
 Yet fast the tears fell from her, and the sobs upheaved her breast:
 And she said: "My youth was happy; but this hour belike is best
 Of all the days of my life-tide, that soon shall have an end.
 I have come to greet thee, Sigmund, then back again must I wend,
 For his bed the Goth-king dighteth: I have lain therein, time was,
 And loathed the sleep I won there: but lo, how all things pass,
 And hearts are changed and softened, for lovely now it seems.
 Yet fear not my forgetting: I shall see thee in my dreams
 A mighty king of the world 'neath the boughs of the Branstock green,
 With thine earls and thy lords about thee as the Volsung fashion hath been.
 And there shall all ye remember how I loved the Volsung name,
 Nor spared to spend for its blooming my joy, and my life, and my fame.
 For hear thou: that Sinfiotli, who hath wrought out our desire,
 Who hath compassed about King Siggeir with this sea of a deadly fire,
 Who brake thy grave asunder—my child and thine he is,
 Begot in that house of the Dwarf-kind for no other end than this;
 The son of Volsung's daughter, the son of Volsung's son.
 Look, look! might another helper this deed with thee have done?"
 And indeed as the word she uttereth, high up the red flames flare
 To the nether floor of the heavens: and yet men see them there,
 The golden roofs of Siggeir, the hall of the silver door
 That the Goths and the Gods had builded to last for evermore.
 She said: "Farewell, my brother, for the earls my candles light,
 And I must wend me bedward lest I lose the flower of night."
 And soft and sweet she kissed him, ere she turned about again,
 And a little while was Signy beheld of the eyes of men;
 And as she crossed the threshold day brightened at her back,
 Nor once did she turn her earthward from the reek and the whirling wrack,
 But fair in the fashion of Queens passed on to the heart of the hall.
 And then King Siggeir's roof-tree upheaved for its utmost fall,
 And its huge walls clashed together, and its mean and lowly things
 The fire of death confounded with the tokens of the kings.
 A sign for many people on the land of the Goths it lay,
 A lamp of the earth none needed, for the bright sun brought the day.

How Sigmund cometh to the Land of the Volsungs again, and of the death of Sinfiotli his Son.

Now Sigmund the king bestirs him, and Sinfiotli, Sigmund's son,
 And they gather a host together, and many a mighty one;
 Then they set the ships in the sea-flood and sail from the stranger's shore,
 And the beaks of the golden dragons see the Volsungs' land once more:
 And men's hearts are fulfilled of joyance; and they cry, The sun shines now
 With never a curse to hide it, and they shall reap that sow!
 Then for many a day sits Sigmund 'neath the boughs of the Branstock green,
 With his earls and lords about him as the Volsung wont hath been.
 And oft he thinketh on Signy and oft he nameth her name,
 And tells how she spent her joyance and her lifedays and her fame
 That the Volsung kin might blossom and bear the fruit of worth
 For the hope of unborn people and the harvest of the earth.
 And again he thinks of the word that he spake that other day,

How he should abide there lonely when his kin was passed away,
 Their glory and sole avenger, their after-summer seed.
 And now for their fame's advancement, and the latter days to speed,
 He weddeth a wife of the King-folk; Borghild she had to name;
 And the woman was fair and lovely and bore him sons of fame;
 Men call them Hamond and Helgi, and when Helgi first saw light,
 There came the Norns to his cradle and gave him life full bright,
 And called him Sunlit Hill, Sharp Sword, and Land of Rings,
 And bade him be lovely and great, and a joy in the tale of kings.
 And he waxed up fair and mighty, and no worser than their word,
 And sweet are the tales of his life-days, and the wonders of his sword,
 And the Maid of the Shield that he wedded, and how he changed his life,
 And of marvels wrought in the gravemound where he rested from the strife.

But the tale of Sinfiotli telleth, that wide in the world he went,
 And many a wall of ravens the edge of his warflame rent;
 And oft he drave the war-prey and wasted many a land:
 Amidst King Hunding's battle he strengthened Helgi's hand;
 And he went before the banners amidst the steel-grown wood,
 When the sons of Hunding gathered and Helgi's hope withstood:
 Nor less he mowed the war-swathe in Helgi's glorious day
 When the kings of the hosts at the Wolf-crag set the battle in array.
 Then at home by his father's high-seat he wore the winter through;
 And the marvel of all men he was for the deeds whereof they knew,
 And the deeds whereof none wotted, and the deeds to follow after.
 And yet but a little while he loved the song and the laughter,
 And the wine that was drunk in peace, and the swordless lying down,
 And the deedless day's uprising and the ungirt golden gown.
 And he thought of the word of his mother, that his day should not be long
 To weary his soul with labour or mingle wrong with wrong;
 And his heart was exceeding hungry o'er all men to prevail,
 And make his short day glorious and leave a goodly tale.

So when green leaves were lengthening and the spring was come again
 He set his ships in the sea-flood and sailed across the main;
 And the brother of Queen Borghild was his fellow in the war,
 A king of hosts hight Gudrod; and each to each they swore,
 And plighted troth for the helping, and the parting of the prey.

Now a long way over the sea-flood they went ashore on a day
 And fought with a mighty folk-king, and overcame at last:
 Then wide about his kingdom the net of steel they cast,
 And the prey was great and goodly that they drave unto the strand.
 But a greedy heart is Gudrod, and a king of griping hand,
 Though nought he blench from the battle; so he speaks on a morning fair,
 And saith:

"Upon the foreshore the booty will we share
 If thou wilt help me, fellow, before we sail our ways."

Sinfiotli laughed, and answered: "O'ershort methinks the days
 That two kings of war should chaffer like merchants of the men:
 I will come again in the even and look on thy dealings then,
 And take the share thou givest."

Then he went his ways withal,
 And drank day-long in his warship as in his father's hall;
 And came again in the even: now hath Gudrod shared the spoil,
 And throughout that day of summer not light had been his toil:

Forsooth his heap was the lesser; but Sinfiotli looked thereon,
And saw that a goodly getting had Borghild's brother won.
Clean-limbed and stark were the horses, and the neat were fat and sleek,
And the men-thralls young and stalwart, and the women young and meek;
Fair-gilt was the harness of battle, and the raiment fresh and bright,
And the household stuff new-fashioned for lords' and earls' delight.
On his own then looked Sinfiotli, and great it was forsooth,
But half-foundered were the horses, and a sight for all men's ruth
Were the thin-ribbed hungry cow-kind; and the thralls both carle and quean
Were the wilful, the weak, and the witless, and the old and the ill-beseen;
Spoilt was the harness and house-gear, and the raiment rags of cloth.

Now Sinfiotli's men beheld it and grew exceeding wroth,
But Sinfiotli laughed and answered: "The day's work hath been meet:
Thou hast done well, war-brother, to sift the chaff from the wheat
Nought have kings' sons to meddle with the refuse of the earth,
Nor shall warriors burden their long-ships with things of nothing worth."

Then he cried across the sea-strand in a voice exceeding great:

"Depart, ye thralls of the battle; ye have nought to do to wait!
Old, young, and good, and evil, depart and share the spoil,
That burden of the battle, that spring and seed of toil.

—But thou king of the greedy heart, thou king of the thievish grip,
What now wilt thou bear to the sea-strand and set within my ship
To buy thy life from the slaying? Unmeet for kings to hear
Of a king the breaker of troth, of a king the stealer of gear."

Then mad-wroth waxed King Gudrod, and he cried: "Stand up, my men!
And slay this wood-abider lest he slay his brothers again!"

But no sword leapt from its sheath, and his men shrank back in dread;
Then Sinfiotli's brow grew smoother, and at last he spake and said:
"Indeed thou art very brother of my father Sigmund's wife:
Wilt thou do so much for thine honour, wilt thou do so much for thy life,
As to bide my sword on the island in the pale of the hazel wands?
For I know thee no battle-blencher, but a valiant man of thine hands."

Now nought King Gudrod gainsayeth, and men dight the hazelled field,
And there on the morrow morning they clash the sword and shield,
And the fallow blades are leaping: short is the tale to tell,
For with the third stroke stricken to field King Gudrod fell.
So there in the holm they lay him; and plenteous store of gold
Sinfiotli lays beside him amid that hall of mould;
"For he gripped," saith the son of Sigmund, "and gathered for such a day."

Then Sinfiotli and his fellows o'er the sea-flood sail away,
And come to the land of the Volsungs: but Borghild heareth the tale,
And into the hall she cometh with eager face and pale
As the kings were feasting together, and glad was Sigmund grown
Of the words of Sinfiotli's battle, and the tale of his great renown:
And there sat the sons of Borghild, and they hearkened and were glad
Of their brother born in the wild-wood, and the crown of fame he had.

So she stood before King Sigmund, and spread her hands abroad:
"I charge thee now, King Sigmund, as thou art the Volsungs' lord,
To tell me of my brother, why cometh he not from the sea?"

Quoth Sinfiotli: "Well thou wottest and the tale hath come to thee:
The white swords met in the island; bright there did the war-shields shine,
And there thy brother abideth, for his hand was worse than mine."

But she heeded him never a whit, but cried on Sigmund and said:
“I charge thee now, King Sigmund, as thou art the lord of my bed,
To drive this wolf of the King-folk from out thy guarded land;
Lest all we of thine house and kindred should fall beneath his hand.”

Then spake King Sigmund the Volsung: “When thou hast heard the tale,
Thou shalt know that somewhat thy brother of his oath to my son did fail;
Nor fell the man all sackless: nor yet need Sigmund’s son
For any slain in sword-field to any soul atone.
Yet for the love I bear thee, and because thy love I know,
And because the man was mighty, and far afield would go,
I will lay down a mighty weregild, a heap of the ruddy gold.”

But no word answered Borghild, for her heart was grim and cold;
And she went from the hall of the feasting, and lay in her bower a while;
Nor speech she took, nor gave it, but brooded deadly guile.
And now again on the morrow to Sigmund the king she went,
And she saith that her wrath hath failed her, and that well is she content
To take the king’s atonement; and she kissed him soft and sweet,
And she kissed Sinfiotli his son, and sat down in the golden seat
All merry and glad by seeming, and blithe to most and least.
And again she biddeth King Sigmund that he hold a funeral feast
For her brother slain on the island; and nought he gainsayeth her will.

And so on an eve of the autumn do men the beakers fill,
And the earls are gathered together ’neath the boughs of the Branstock green;
There gold-clad mid the feasting went Borghild, Sigmund’s Queen,
And she poured the wine for Sinfiotli, and smiled in his face and said:
“Drink now of this cup from mine hand, and bury we hate that is dead.”

So he took the cup from her fingers, nor drank but pondered long
O’er the gathering days of his labour, and the intermingled wrong.

Now he sat by the side of his father; and Sigmund spake a word:
“O son, why sittest thou silent mid the glee of earl and lord?”

“I look in the cup,” quoth Sinfiotli, “and hate therein I see.”

“Well looked it is,” said Sigmund; “give thou the cup to me,”
And he drained it dry to the bottom; for ye mind how it was writ
That this king might drink of venom, and have no hurt of it.
But the song sprang up in the hall, and merry was Sigmund’s heart,
And he drank of the wine of King-folk and thrust all care apart.

Then the second time came Borghild and stood before the twain,
And she said: “O valiant step-son, how oft shall I say it in vain,
That my hate for thee hath perished, and the love hath sprouted green?
Wilt thou thrust my gift away, and shame the hand of a queen?”

So he took the cup from her fingers, and pondered over it long,
And thought on the labour that should be, and the wrong that amendeth wrong.

Then spake Sigmund the King: “O son, what aileth thine heart,
When the earls of men are merry, and thrust all care apart?”

But he said: “I have looked in the cup, and I see the deadly snare.”

“Well seen it is,” quoth Sigmund, “but thy burden I may bear.”
And he took the beaker and drained it, and the song rose up in the hall;
And fair bethought King Sigmund his latter days befall.

But again came Borghild the Queen and stood with the cup in her hand,
And said: “They are idle liars, those singers of every land
Who sing how thou fearest nothing; for thou lovest valour and might,
And art fain to live for ever.”

Then she stretched forth her fingers white,
And he took the cup from her hand, nor drank, but pondered long
Of the toil that begetteth toil, and the wrong that beareth wrong.
But Sigmund turned him about, and he said: "What aileth thee, son?
Shall our life-days never be merry, and our labour never be done?"
But Sinfiotli said: "I have looked, and lo there is death in the cup."
And the song, and the tinkling of harp-strings to the roof-tree winded up:
And Sigmund was dreamy with wine and the wearing of many a year;
And the noise and the glee of the people as the sound of the wild woods were,
And the blossoming boughs of the Branstock were the wild trees waving about;
So he said: "Well seen, my fosterling; let the lip then strain it out."
Then Sinfiotli laughed and answered: "I drink unto Odin then,
And the Dwellers up in God-home, the lords of the lives of men."
He drank as he spake the word, and forthwith the venom ran
In a chill flood over his heart, and down fell the mighty man
With never an uttered death-word and never a death-changed look,
And the floor of the hall of the Volsungs beneath his falling shook.
Then up rose the elder of days with a great and bitter cry
And lifted the head of the fallen, and none durst come anigh
To hearken the words of his sorrow, if any words he said,
But such as the Father of all men might speak over Baldur dead.
And again, as before the death-stroke, waxed the hall of the Volsungs dim,
And once more he seemed in the forest, where he spake with nought but him.
Then he lifted him up from the hall-floor and bore him on his breast,
And men who saw Sinfiotli deemed his heart had gotten rest,
And his eyes were no more dreadful. Forth fared the Volsung child
With Signy's son through the doorway; and the wind was great and wild,
And the moon rode high in the heavens, and whiles it shone out bright,
And whiles the clouds drew over. So went he through the night,
Until the dwellings of man-folk were a long while left behind.
Then came he unto the thicket and the houses of the wind,
And the feet of the hoary mountains, and the dwellings of the deer,
And the heaths without a shepherd, and the houseless dales and drear.
Then lo, a mighty water, a rushing flood and wide,
And no ferry for the shipless; so he went along its side,
As a man that seeketh somewhat: but it widened toward the sea,
And the moon sank down in the west, and he went o'er a desert lea.
But lo, in that dusk ere the dawning a glimmering over the flood,
And the sound of the cleaving of waters, and Sigmund the Volsung stood
By the edge of the swirling eddy, and a white-sailed boat he saw,
And its keel ran light on the strand with the last of the dying flaw.
But therein was a man most mighty, grey-clad like the mountain-cloud,
One-eyed and seeming ancient, and he spake and hailed him aloud:
"Now whither away, King Sigmund, for thou farest far to-night?"
Spake the King: "I would cross this water, for my life hath lost its light,
And mayhap there be deeds for a king to be found on the further shore."
"My senders," quoth the shipman, "bade me waft a great king o'er,
So set thy burden a shipboard, for the night's face looks toward day."
So betwixt the earth and the water his son did Sigmund lay;
But lo, when he fain would follow, there was neither ship nor man,
Nor aught but his empty bosom beside that water wan,
That whitened by little and little as the night's face looked to the day.

So he stood a long while gazing and then turned and gat him away;
 And ere the sun of the noon-tide across the meadows shone
 Sigmund the King of the Volsungs was set in his father's throne,
 And he hearkened and doomed and portioned, and did all the deeds of a king.
 So the autumn waned and perished, and the winter brought the spring.

Of the last battle of King Sigmund, and the death of him.

Now is Queen Borghild driven from the Volsung's bed and board,
 And unwedded sitteth Sigmund an exceeding mighty lord,
 And fareth oft to the war-field, and addeth fame to fame:
 And where'er are the great ones told of his sons shall the people name;
 But short was their day of harvest and their reaping of renown,
 And while men stood by to marvel they gained their latest crown.
 So Sigmund alone abideth of all the Volsung seed,
 And the folk that the Gods had fashioned lest the earth should lack a deed
 And he said: "The tree was stalwart, but its boughs are old and worn.
 Where now are the children departed, that amidst my life were born?
 I know not the men about me, and they know not of my ways:
 I am nought but a picture of battle, and a song for the people to praise.
 I must strive with the deeds of my kingship, and yet when mine hour is come
 It shall meet me as glad as the goodman when he bringeth the last load home."

Now there was a king of the Islands, whom the tale doth Eylimi call,
 And saith he was wise and valiant, though his kingdom were but small:
 He had one only daughter that Hiordis had to name,
 A woman wise and shapely beyond the praise of fame.
 And now saith the son of King Volsung that his time is short enow
 To labour the Volsung garden, and the hand must be set to the plough:
 So he sendeth an earl of the people to King Eylimi's high-built hall,
 Bearing the gifts and the tokens, and this word in his mouth withal:

"King Sigmund the son of Volsung hath sent me here with a word
 That plenteous good of thy daughter among all folk he hath heard,
 And he woeth that wisest of women that she may sit on his throne,
 And lie in the bed of the Volsungs, and be his wife alone.
 And he saith that he thinketh surely she shall bear the kings of the earth,
 And maybe the best and the greatest of all who are deemed of worth.
 Now hereof would he have an answer within a half-month's space,
 And these gifts meanwhile he giveth for the increase of thy grace."

So King Eylimi hearkened the message, and hath no word to say,
 For an earl of King Lyngi the mighty is come that very day,
 He too for the wooing of Hiordis: and Lyngi's realm is at hand,
 But afar King Sigmund abideth o'er many a sea and land:
 And the man is young and eager, and grim and guileful of mood.

At last he sayeth: "Abide here such space as thou deemest good,
 But tomorn shalt thou have thine answer that thine heart may the lighter be
 For the hearkening of harp and songcraft, and the dealing with game and glee."
 Then he went to Queen Hiordis bower, where she worked in the silk and the gold
 The deeds of the world that should be, and the deeds that were of old.
 And he stood before her and said:

"I have spoken a word, time was,

That thy will should rule thy wedding; and now hath it come to pass
 That again two kings of the people will woo thy body to bed."

So she rose to her feet and hearkened: "And which be they?" she said.

He spake: "The first is Lyngi, a valiant man and a fair,
A neighbour ill for thy father, if a foe's name he must bear:
And the next is King Sigmund the Volsung of a land far over sea,
And well thou knowest his kindred, and his might and his valiancy,
And the tales of his heart of a God; and though old he be waxen now,
Yet men deem that the wide world's blossom from Sigmund's loins shall grow."

Said Hiordis: "I wot, my father, that hereof may strife arise;
Yet soon spoken is mine answer; for I, who am called the wise,
Shall I thrust by the praise of the people, and the tale that no ending hath,
And the love and the heart of the godlike, and the heavenward-leading path,
For the rose and the stem of the lily, and the smooth-lipped youngling's kiss,
And the eyes' desire that passeth, and the frail unstable bliss?
Now shalt thou tell King Sigmund, that I deem it the crown of my life
To dwell in the house of his fathers amidst all peace and strife,
And to bear the sons of his body: and indeed full well I know
That fair from the loins of Sigmund shall such a stem outgrow
That all folk of the earth shall be praising the womb where once he lay
And the paps that his lips have cherished, and shall bless my happy day."

Now the king's heart sore misgave him, but herewith must he be content,
And great gifts to the earl of Lyngi and a word withal he sent,
That the woman's troth was plighted to another people's king.
But King Sigmund's earl on the morrow hath joyful yea-saying,
And ere two moons be perished he shall fetch his bride away.
"And bid him," King Eylimi sayeth, "to come with no small array,
But with sword and shield and war-shaft, lest aught of ill betide."

So forth goes the earl of Sigmund across the sea-flood wide,
And comes to the land of the Volsungs, and meeteth Sigmund the king,
And tells how he sped on his errand, and the joyful yea-saying.

So King Sigmund maketh him ready, and they ride adown to the sea
All glorious of gear and raiment, and a goodly company.
Yet hath Sigmund thought of his father, and the deed he wrought before,
And hath scorn to gather his people and all his hosts of war
To wend to the feast and the wedding: yet are their long-ships ten,
And the shielded folk aboard them are the mightiest men of men.

So Sigmund goeth a shipboard, and they hoist their sails to the wind,
And the beaks of the golden dragons leave the Volsungs' land behind.
Then come they to Eylimi's kingdom, and good welcome have they there,
And when Sigmund looked on Hiordis, he deemed her wise and fair.
But her heart was exceeding fain when she saw the glorious king,
And it told her of times that should be full many a noble thing.

So there is Sigmund wedded at a great and goodly feast,
And day by day on Hiordis the joy of her heart increased;
And her father joyed in Sigmund and his might and majesty,
And dead in the heart of the Isle-king his ancient fear did lie.

Yet, forsooth, had men looked seaward, they had seen the gathering cloud,
And the little wind arising, that should one day pipe so loud.
For well may ye wot indeed that King Lyngi the Mighty is wroth,
When he getteth the gifts and the answer, and that tale of the woman's troth:
And he saith he will have the gifts and the woman herself withal,
Either for loving or hating, and that both those heads shall fall.
So now when Sigmund and Hiordis are wedded a month or more,
And the Volsung bids men dight them to cross the sea-flood o'er,
Lo, how there cometh the tidings of measureless mighty hosts
Who are gotten ashore from their long-ships on the skirts of King Eylimi's coasts.

Sore boded the heart of the Isle-king of what the end should be.
 But Sigmund long beheld him, and he said: "Thou deem'st of me
 That my coming hath brought thee evil; but put aside such things;
 For long have I lived, and I know it, that the lives of mighty kings
 Are not cast away, nor drifted like the down before the wind;
 And surely I know, who say it, that never would Hiordis' mind
 Have been turned to wed King Lyngi or aught but the Volsung seed
 Come, go we forth to the battle, that shall be the latest deed
 Of thee and me meseemeth: yea, whether thou live or die,
 No more shall the brand of Odin at peace in his scabbard lie."

And therewith he brake the peace-strings and drew the blade of bale,
 And Death on the point abided, Fear sat on the edges pale.

So men ride adown to the sea-strand, and the kings their hosts array
 When the high noon flooded heaven; and the men of the Volsungs lay,
 With King Eylimi's shielded champions mid Lyngi's hosts of war,
 As the brown pips lie in the apple when ye cut it through the core.

But now when the kings were departed, from the King's house Hiordis went,
 And before men joined the battle she came to a woody bent,
 Where she lay with one of her maidens the death and the deeds to behold.

In the noon sun shone King Sigmund as an image all of gold,
 And he stood before the foremost and the banner of his fame,
 And many a thing he remembered, and he called on each earl by his name
 To do well for the house of the Volsungs, and the ages yet unborn.
 Then he tossed up the sword of the Branstock, and blew on his father's horn,
 Dread of so many a battle, doom-song of so many a man.
 Then all the earth seemed moving as the hosts of Lyngi ran
 On the Volsung men and the Isle-folk like wolves upon the prey;
 But sore was their labour and toil ere the end of their harvesting day.

On went the Volsung banners, and on went Sigmund before,
 And his sword was the flail of the tiller on the wheat of the wheat-thrashing floor,
 And his shield was rent from his arm, and his helm was sheared from his head:
 But who may draw nigh him to smite for the heap and the rampart of dead?
 White went his hair on the wind like the ragged drift of the cloud,
 And his dust-driven, blood-beaten harness was the death-storm's angry shroud,
 When the summer sun is departing in the first of the night of wrack;
 And his sword was the cleaving lightning, that smites and is hurried aback
 Ere the hand may rise against it; and his voice was the following thunder.

Then cold grew the battle before him, dead-chilled with the fear and the wonder:
 For again in his ancient eyes the light of victory gleamed;
 From his mouth grown tuneful and sweet the song of his kindred streamed;
 And no more was he worn and weary, and no more his life seemed spent:
 And with all the hope of his childhood was his wrath of battle blent;
 And he thought: A little further, and the river of strife is passed,
 And I shall sit triumphant the king of the world at last.

But lo, through the hedge of the war-shafts a mighty man there came,
 One-eyed and seeming ancient, but his visage shone like flame:
 Gleaming-grey was his kirtle, and his hood was cloudy blue;
 And he bore a mighty twi-bill, as he waded the fight-sheaves through,
 And stood face to face with Sigmund, and upheaved the bill to smite.
 Once more round the head of the Volsung fierce glittered the Branstock's light,
 The sword that came from Odin; and Sigmund's cry once more
 Rang out to the very heavens above the din of war.
 Then clashed the meeting edges with Sigmund's latest stroke,

And in shivering shards fell earthward that fear of worldly folk.
But changed were the eyes of Sigmund, and the war-wrath left his face;
For that grey-clad mighty helper was gone, and in his place
Drave on the unbroken spear-wood 'gainst the Volsung's empty hands:
And there they smote down Sigmund, the wonder of all lands,
On the foemen, on the death-heap his deeds had piled that day.
Ill hour for Sigmund's fellows! they fall like the seeded hay
Before the brown scythes' sweeping, and there the Isle-king fell
In the fore-front of his battle, wherein he wrought right well,
And soon they were nought but foemen who stand upon their feet
On the isle-strand by the ocean where the grass and the sea-sand meet.
And now hath the conquering War-king another deed to do,
And he saith: "Who now gainsayeth King Lyngi come to woo,
The lord and the overcomer and the bane of the Volsung kin?"
So he fares to the Isle-king's dwelling a wife of the kings to win;
And the host is gathered together, and they leave the field of the dead;
And round as a targe of the Goth-folk the moon ariseth red.
And so when the last is departed, and she deems they will come not aback,
Fares Hiordis forth from the thicket to the field of the fateful wrack,
And half-dead was her heart for sorrow as she waded the swathes of the sword.
Not far did she search the death-field ere she found her king and lord
On the heap that his glaive had fashioned: not yet was his spirit past,
Though his hurts were many and grievous, and his life-blood ebbing fast;
And glad were his eyes and open as her wan face over him hung,
And he spake:
"Thou art sick with sorrow, and I would thou wert not so young;
Yet as my days passed shall thine pass; and a short while now it seems
Since my hand first gripped the sword-hilt, and my glory was but in dreams."
She said: "Thou livest, thou livest! the leeches shall heal thee still."
"Nay," said he, "my heart hath hearkened to Odin's bidding and will;
For today have mine eyes beheld him: nay, he needed not to speak:
Forsooth I knew of his message and the thing he came to seek.
And now do I live but to tell thee of the days that are yet to come:
And perchance to solace thy sorrow; and then will I get me home
To my kin that are gone before me. Lo, yonder where I stood
The shards of a glaive of battle that was once the best of the good:
Take them and keep them surely. I have lived no empty days;
The Norns were my nursing mothers; I have won the people's praise.
When the Gods for one deed asked me I ever gave them twain;
Spendthrift of glory I was, and great was my life-days' gain;
Now these shards have been my fellow in the work the Gods would have,
But today hath Odin taken the gift that once he gave.
I have wrought for the Volsungs truly, and yet have I known full well
That a better one than I am shall bear the tale to tell:
And for him shall these shards be smithied; and he shall be my son
To remember what I have forgotten and to do what I left undone.
Under thy girdle he lieth, and how shall I say unto thee,
Unto thee, the wise of women, to cherish him heedfully.
Now, wife, put by thy sorrow for the little day we have had;
For in sooth I deem thou weepst: The days have been fair and glad:
And our valour and wisdom have met, and thou knowest they shall not die:
Sweet and good were the days, nor yet to the Fates did we cry
For a little longer yet, and a little longer to live:
But we took, we twain in our meeting, all gifts that they had to give:

Our wisdom and valour have kissed, and thine eyes shall see the fruit,
 And the joy for his days that shall be hath pierced mine heart to the root.
 Grieve not for me; for thou weepest that thou canst not see my face
 How its beauty is not departed, nor the hope of mine eyes grown base.
 Indeed I am waxen weary; but who heedeth weariness
 That hath been day-long on the mountain in the winter weather's stress,
 And now stands in the lighted doorway and seeth the king draw nigh,
 And heareth men dighting the banquet, and the bed wherein he shall lie?"

Then failed the voice of Sigmund; but so mighty was the man,
 That a long while yet he lingered till the dusky night grew wan,
 And she sat and sorrowed o'er him, but no more a word he spake.
 Then a long way over the sea-flood the day began to break;
 And when the sun was arisen a little he turned his head
 Till the low beams bathed his eyen, and there lay Sigmund dead.
 And the sun rose up on the earth; but where was the Volsung kin
 And the folk that the Gods had begotten the praise of all people to win?

How King Sigmund the Volsung was laid in mound on the sea-side of the Isle-realm.

Now Hiordis looked from the dead, and her eyes strayed down to the sea,
 And a shielded ship she saw, and a war-dight company,
 Who beached the ship for the landing: so swift she fled away,
 And once more to the depth of the thicket, wherein her handmaid lay:
 And she said: "I have left my lord, and my lord is dead and gone,
 And he gave me a charge full heavy, and here are we twain alone,
 And earls from the sea are landing: give me thy blue attire,
 And take my purple and gold and my crown of the sea-flood's fire,
 And be thou the wife of King Volsung when men of our names shall ask,
 And I will be the handmaid: now I bid thee to this task,
 And I pray thee not to fail me, because of thy faith and truth,
 And because I have ever loved thee, and thy mother fostered my youth.
 Yea, because my womb is wealthy with a gift for the days to be.
 Now do this deed for mine asking and the tale shall be told of thee."

So the other nought gainsaith it and they shift their raiment there:
 But well-spoken was the maiden, and a woman tall and fair.

Now the lord of those new-coming men was a king and the son of a king,
 King Elf the son of the Helper, and he sailed from war-faring
 And drew anigh to the Isle-realm and sailed along the strand;
 For the shipmen needed water and fain would go a-land;
 And King Elf stood hard by the tiller while the world was yet a-cold:
 Then the red sun lit the dawning, and they looked, and lo, behold!
 The wrack of a mighty battle, and heaps of the shielded dead,
 And a woman alive amidst them, a queen with crownèd head,
 And her eyes strayed down to the sea-strand, and she saw that weaponed folk,
 And turned and fled to the thicket: then the lord of the shipmen spoke:
 "Lo, here shall we lack for water, for the brooks with blood shall run,
 Yet wend we ashore to behold it and to wot of the deeds late done."

So they turned their faces to Sigmund, and waded the swathes of the sword.
 "O, look ye long," said the Sea-king, "for here lieth a mighty lord:
 And all these are the deeds of his war-flame, yet hardy hearts, be sure,
 That they once durst look in his face or the wrath of his eyen endure;
 Though his lips be glad and smiling as a God that dreameth of mirth.
 Would God I were one of his kindred, for none such are left upon earth.

Now fare we into the thicket, for thereto is the woman fled,
And belike she shall tell us the story of this field of the mighty dead."

So they wend and find the women, and bespeak them kind and fair:
Then spake the gold-crowned handmaid: "Of the Isle-king's house we were,
And I am the Queen called Hiordis; and the man that lies on the field
Was mine own lord Sigmund the Volsung, the mightiest under shield."

Then all amazed were the sea-folk when they hearkened to that word,
And great and heavy tidings they deem their ears have heard:
But again spake out the Sea-king: "And this blue-clad one beside,
So pale, and as tall as a Goddess, and white and lovely eyed?"

"In sooth and in troth," said the woman, "my serving-maid is this;
She hath wept long over the battle, and sore afraid she is."

Now the king looks hard upon her, but he saith no word thereto,
And down again to the death-field with the women-folk they go.
There they set their hands to the labour, and amidst the deadly mead
They raise a mound for Sigmund, a mighty house indeed;
And therein they set that folk-king, and goodly was his throne,
And dight with gold and scarlet: and the walls of the house were done
With the cloven shields of the foemen, and banners borne to field;
But none might find his war-helm or the splinters of his shield,
And clenched and fast was his right hand, but no sword therein he had:
For Hiordis spake to the shipmen:

"Our lord and master bade
That the shards of his glaive of battle should go with our lady the Queen:
And by them that lie a-dying a many things are seen."

So there lies Sigmund the Volsung, and far away, forlorn
Are the blossomed boughs of the Branstock, and the house where he was born.
To what end was wrought that roof-ridge, and the rings of the silver door,
And the fair-carved golden high-seat, and the many-pictured floor
Worn down by the feet of the Volsungs? or the hangings of delight,
Or the marvel of its harp-strings, or the Dwarf-wrought beakers bright?
Then the Gods have fashioned a folk who have fashioned a house in vain;
It is nought, and for nought they battled, and nought was their joy and their pain,
Lo, the noble oak of the forest with his feet in the flowers and grass,
How the winds that bear the summer o'er its topmost branches pass,
And the wood-deer dwell beneath it, and the fowl in its fair twigs sing,
And there it stands in the forest, an exceeding glorious thing:
Then come the axes of men, and low it lies on the ground,
And the crane comes out of the southland, and its nest is nowhere found,
And bare and shorn of its blossoms is the house of the deer of the wood.
But the tree is a golden dragon; and fair it floats on the flood,
And beareth the kings and the earl-folk, and is shield-hung all without:
And it seeth the blaze of the beacons, and heareth the war-God's shout.
There are tidings wherever it cometh, and the tale of its time shall be told
A dear name it hath got like a king, and a fame that groweth not old.

Lo, such is the Volsung dwelling; lo, such is the deed he hath wrought
Who laboured all his life-days, and had rest but little or nought,
Who died in the broken battle; who lies with swordless hand
In the realm that the foe hath conquered on the edge of a stranger-land.

How Queen Hiordis is known; and how she abideth in the house of Elf the son of the Helper.

Now asketh the king of those women where now in the world they will go,

And Hiordis speaks for the twain; "This is now but a land of the foe
And our lady and Queen beseecheth that unto thine house we wend
And that there thou serve her kingly that her woes may have an end."

Fain then was the heart of the folk-king, and he bade aboard forth-right.
And they hoist the sails to the wind and sail by day and by night
Till they come to a land of the people, and a goodly land it is
Where folk may dwell unharried and win abundant bliss,
The land of King Elf and the Helper; and there he bids them abide
In his house that is goodly shapen, and wrought full high and wide:
And he biddeth the Queen be merry, and set aside her woe,
And he doth by them better and better, as day on day doth go.

Now there was the mother of Elf, and a woman wise was she,
And she spake to her son of a morning: "I have noted them heedfully.
Those women thou broughtst from the outlands, and fain now would I wot
Why the worser of the women the goodlier gear hath got."

He said: "She hath named her Hiordis, the wife of the mightiest king,
E'en Sigmund the son of Volsung with whose name the world doth ring."

Then the old queen laughed and answered: "Is it not so, my son.
That the handmaid still gave counsel when aught of deeds was done?"

He said: "Yea, she spake mostly; and her words were exceeding wise.
And measureless sweet I deem her, and dear she is to mine eyes."

But she said: "Do after my counsel, and win thee a goodly queen:
Speak ye to the twain unwary, and the truth shall soon be seen,
And again shall they shift their raiment, if I am aught but a fool."

He said: "Thou sayst well, mother, and settest me well to school."
So he spake on a day to the women, and said to the gold-clad one:
"How wottest thou in the winter of the coming of the sun
When yet the world is darkling?"

She said: "In the days of my youth
I dwelt in the house of my father, and fair was the tide forsooth,
And ever I woke at the dawning, for folk betimes must stir,
Be the meadows bright or darksome; and I drank of the whey-tub there
As much as the heart desired; and now, though changed be the days,
I wake athirst in the dawning, because of my wonted ways."

Then laughed King Elf and answered: "A fashion strange enow,
That the feet of the fair queen's-daughter must forth to follow the plough,
Be the acres bright or darkling! But thou with the eyes of grey.
What sign hast thou to tell thee, that the night wears into day
When the heavens are mirk as the midnight?"

Said she, "In the days that were
My father gave me this gold-ring ye see on my finger here.
And a marvel goeth with it: for when night waxeth old
I feel it on my finger grown most exceeding cold,
And I know day comes through the darkness; and such is my dawning sign."

Then laughed King Elf and answered: "Thy father's house was fine;
There was gold enough meseemeth—But come now, say the word
And tell me the speech thou spakest awrong mine ears have heard,
And that thou wert the wife of Sigmund the wife of the mightiest King."

No whit she smiled, but answered. "Indeed thou sayst the thing:
Such a wealth I had in my storehouse that I feared the Kings of men."

He said: "Yet for nought didst thou hide thee; had I known of the matter then,
As the daughter of my father had I held thee in good sooth,

For dear to mine eyes wert thou waxen, and my heart of thy woe was ruth.
 But now shall I deal with thee better than thy dealings to me have been:
 For my wife I will bid thee to be, and the people's very queen."

She said: "When the son of King Sigmund is brought forth to the light of day
 And the world a man hath gotten, thy will shall I nought gainsay.
 And I thank thee for thy goodness, and I know the love of thine heart;
 And I see thy goodly kingdom, thy country set apart,
 With the day of peace begirdled from the change and the battle's wrack:
 'Tis enough, and more than enough since none prayeth the past aback."

Then the King is fain and merry, and he deems his errand sped,
 And that night she sits on the high-seat with the crown on her shapely head:
 And amidst the song and the joyance, and the sound of the people's praise,
 She thinks of the days that have been, and she dreams of the coming days.

So passeth the summer season, and the harvest of the year,
 And the latter days of the winter on toward the springtide wear.

1 REGIN.

*Now this is the first book of the life and death of sigurd the volsung, and therein is told of the birth of him,
 and of his dealings with regin the master of masters, and of his deeds in the waste places of the earth.*

Of the birth of Sigurd the son of Sigmund.

Peace lay on the land of the Helper and the house of Elf his son;
 There merry men went bedward when their tide of toil was done,
 And glad was the dawn's awakening, and the noon-tide fair and glad:
 There no great store had the franklin, and enough the hireling had;
 And a child might go unguarded the length and breadth of the land
 With a purse of gold at his girdle and gold rings on his hand.
 'Twas a country of cunning craftsmen, and many a thing they wrought,
 That the lands of storm desired, and the homes of warfare sought.
 But men deemed it o'er-well warded by more than its stems of fight,
 And told how its earth-born watchers yet lived of plenteous might.
 So hidden was that country, and few men sailed its sea,
 And none came o'er its mountains of men-folk's company.
 But fair-fruited, many-peopled, it lies a goodly strip,
 'Twixt the mountains cloudy-headed and the sea-flood's surging lip,
 And a perilous flood is its ocean, and its mountains, who shall tell
 What things in their dales deserted and their wind-swept heaths may dwell.

Now a man of the Kings, called Gripir, in this land of peace abode:
 The son of the Helper's father, though never lay his load
 In the womb of the mother of Kings that the Helper's brethren bore;
 But of Giant kin was his mother, of the folk that are seen no more;
 Though whiles as ye ride some fell-road across the heath there comes
 The voice of their lone lamenting o'er their changed and conquered homes.
 A long way off from the sea-strand and beneath the mountains' feet
 Is the high-built hall of Gripir, where the waste and the tillage meet;
 A noble and plentiful house, that a little men-folk fear.
 But beloved of the crag-dwelling eagles and the kin of the woodland deer.
 A man of few words was Gripir, but he knew of all deeds that had been,
 And times there came upon him, when the deeds to be were seen:
 No sword had he held in his hand since his father fell to field,
 And against the life of the slayer he bore undinted shield:
 Yet no fear in his heart abided, nor desired he aught at all,
 But he noted the deeds that had been, and looked for what should befall.

Again, in the house of the Helper there dwelt a certain man
Beardless and low of stature, of visage pinched and wan:
So exceeding old was Regin, that no son of man could tell
In what year of the days passed over he came to that land to dwell:
But the youth of King Elf had he fostered, and the Helper's youth thereto,
Yea and his father's father's: the lore of all men he knew,
And was deft in every cunning, save the dealings of the sword:
So sweet was his tongue-speech fashioned, that men trowed his every word;
His hand with the harp-strings blended was the mingler of delight
With the latter days of sorrow; all tales he told aright;
The Master of the Masters in the smithying craft was he;
And he dealt with the wind and the weather and the stilling of the sea;
Nor might any learn him leech-craft, for before that race was made,
And that man-folk's generation, all their life-days had he weighed.

In this land abideth Hiordis amid all people's praise
Till cometh the time appointed: in the fulness of the days
Through the dark and the dusk she travailed, till at last in the dawning hour
Have the deeds of the Volsungs blossomed, and born their latest flower;
In the bed there lieth a man-child, and his eyes look straight on the sun,
And lo, the hope of the people, and the days of a king are begun.

Men say of the serving-women, when they cried on the joy of the morn,
When they handled the linen raiment, and washed the king new-born,
When they bore him back unto Hiordis, and the weary and happy breast,
And bade her be glad to behold it, how the best was sprung from the best,
Yet they shrank in their rejoicing before the eyes of the child,
So bright and dreadful were they; yea though the spring morn smiled,
And a thousand birds were singing round the fair familiar home,
And still as on other mornings they saw folk go and come,
Yet the hour seemed awful to them, and the hearts within them burned
As though of fateful matters their souls were newly learned.

But Hiordis looked on the Volsung, on her grief and her fond desire,
And the hope of her heart was quickened, and her joy was a living fire;
And she said: "Now one of the earthly on the eyes of my child hath gazed
Nor shrunk before their glory, nor stayed her love amazed:
I behold thee as Sigmund beholdeth,—and I was the home of thine heart—
Woe's me for the day when thou wert not, and the hour when we shall part!"

Then she held him a little season on her weary and happy breast
And she told him of Sigmund and Volsung and the best sprung forth from the best:
She spake to the new-born baby as one who might understand,
And told him of Sigmund's battle, and the dead by the sea-flood's strand,
And of all the wars passed over, and the light with darkness blent.

So she spake, and the sun rose higher, and her speech at last was spent,
And she gave him back to the women to bear forth to the people's kings,
That they too may rejoice in her glory and her day of happy things.

But there sat the Helper of Men with King Elf and his Earls in the hall,
And they spake of the deeds that had been, and told of the times to befall,
And they hearkened and heard sweet voices and the sound of harps draw nigh,
Till their hearts were exceeding merry and they knew not wherefore or why:
Then, lo, in the hall white raiment, as thither the damsels came,
And amid the hands of the foremost was the woven gold aflame.

"O daughters of earls," said the Helper, "what tidings then do ye bear?
Is it grief in the merry morning, or joy or wonder or fear?"

Quoth the first: "It is grief for the foemen that the Masters of God-home would grieve."

Said the next: "'Tis a wonder of wonders, that the hearkening world shall believe."

"A fear of all fears," said the third, "for the sword is uplifted on men."

"A joy of all joys," said the fourth, "once come, and it comes not again!"

"Lo, son," said the ancient Helper, "glad sit the earls and the lords!

Lookst thou not for a token of tidings to follow such-like words?"

Saith King Elf: "Great words of women! or great hath our dwelling become."

Said the women: "Words shall be greater, when all folk shall praise our home."

"What then hath betid," said King Elf, "do the high Gods stand in our gate?"

"Nay," said they, "else were we silent, and they should be telling of fate."

"Is the bidding come," said the Helper, "that we wend the Gods to see?"

"Many summers and winters," they said, "ye shall live on the earth, it may be."

Said a young man: "Will ye be telling that all we shall die no more?"

"Nay," they answered, "nay, who knoweth but the change may be hard at the door?"

"Come ships from the sea," said an elder, "with all gifts of the Eastland gold?"

"Was there less than enough," said the women, "when last our treasure was told?"

"Speak then," said the ancient Helper, "let the worst and the best be said."

Quoth they: "'Tis the Queen of the Isle-folk, she is weary-sick on her bed."

Said King Elf: "Yet ye come rejoicing; what more lieth under the tongue?"

They said: "The earth is weary: but the tender blade hath sprung,

That shall wax till beneath its branches fair bloom the meadows green;

For the Gods and they that were mighty were glad erewhile with the Queen."

Said King Elf: "How say ye, women? Of a King new-born do ye tell,

By a God of the Heavens begotten in our fathers' house to dwell?"

"By a God of the Earth," they answered; "but greater yet is the son,

Though long were the days of Sigmund, and great are the deeds he hath done."

Then she with the golden burden to the kingly high-seat stepped

And away from the new-born baby the purple cloths she swept,

And cried: "O King of the people, long mayst thou live in bliss,

As our hearts today are happy! Queen Hiordis sends thee this,

And she saith that the world shall call it by the name that thou shalt name;

Now the gift to thee is given, and to thee is brought the fame."

Then e'en as a man astonied King Elf the Volsung took,

While his feast-hall's ancient timbers with the cry of the earl-folk shook;

For the eyes of the child gleamed on him till he was as one who sees

The very Gods arising mid their carven images:

To his ears there came a murmur of far seas beneath the wind

And the tramp of fierce-eyed warriors through the outland forest blind;

The sound of hosts of battle, cries round the hoisted shield,

Low talk of the gathered wise-ones in the Goth-folk's holy field:

So the thought in a little moment through King Elf the mighty ran

Of the years and their building and burden, and toil of the sons of man,

The joy of folk and their sorrow, and the hope of deeds to do:

With the love of many peoples was the wise king smitten through,

As he hung o'er the new-born Volsung; but at last he raised his head,

And looked forth kind o'er his people, and spake aloud and said:

"O Sigmund King of Battle; O man of many days,

Whom I saw mid the shields of the fallen and the dead men's silent praise,

Lo, how hath the dark tide perished and the dawn of day begun!

And now, O mighty Sigmund, wherewith shall we name thy son?"

But there rose up a man most ancient, and he cried: "Hail Dawn of the Day!
 How many things shalt thou quicken, how many shalt thou slay!
 How many things shalt thou waken, how many lull to sleep!
 How many things shalt thou scatter, how many gather and keep!
 O me, how thy love shall cherish, how thine hate shall wither and burn!
 How the hope shall be sped from thy right hand, nor the fear to thy left return!
 O thy deeds that men shall sing of! O thy deeds that the Gods shall see!
 O SIGURD, Son of the Volsungs, O Victory yet to be!"

Men heard the name and they knew it, and they caught it up in the air,
 And it went abroad by the windows and the doors of the feast-hall fair,
 It went through street and market; o'er meadow and acre it went,
 And over the wind-stirred forest and the dearth of the sea-beat bent,
 And over the sea-flood's welter, till the folk of the fishers heard,
 And the hearts of the isle-abiders on the sun-scorched rocks were stirred.

But the Queen in her golden chamber, the name she hearkened and knew
 And she heard the flock of the women, as back to the chamber they drew,
 And the name of Sigurd entered, and the body of Sigurd was come,
 And it was as if Sigmund were living and she still in her lovely home;
 Of all folk of the world was she well, and a soul fulfilled of rest
 As alone in the chamber she wakened and Sigurd cherished her breast.

But men feast in the merry noontide, and glad is the April green
 That a Volsung looks on the sunlight and the night and the darkness have been.
 Earls think of marvellous stories, and along the golden strings
 Flit words of banded brethren and names of war-fain Kings:
 All the days of the deeds of Sigmund who was born so long ago;
 All deeds of the glorious Signy, and her tarrying-tide of woe;
 Men tell of the years of Volsung, and how long ago it was
 That he changed his life in battle, and brought the tale to pass:
 Then goeth the word of the Giants, and the world seems waxen old
 For the dimness of King Rerir and the tale of his warfare told:
 Yet unhushed are the singers' voices, nor yet the harp-strings cease
 While yet is left a rumour of the mirk-wood's broken peace,
 And of Sigi the very ancient, and the unnamed Sons of God,
 Of the days when the Lords of Heaven full oft the world-ways trod.
 So stilleth the wind in the even and the sun sinks down in the sea,
 And men abide the morrow and the Victory yet to be.

Sigurd getteth to him the horse that is called Greyfell.

Now waxeth the son of Sigmund in might and goodliness,
 And soft the days win over, and all men his beauty bless.
 But amidst the summer season was the Isle-queen Hiordis wed
 To King Elf the son of the Helper, and fair their life-days sped.
 Peace lay on the land for ever, and the fields gave good increase,
 And there was Sigurd waxing mid the plenty and the peace.
 Now hath the child grown greater, and is keen and eager of wit
 And full of understanding, and oft hath he joy to sit
 Amid talk of weighty matters when the wise men meet for speech;
 And joyous he is moreover and blithe and kind with each.
 But Regin the wise craftsman heedeth the youngling well,
 And before the Kings he cometh, and saith such words to tell.
 "I have fostered thy youth, King Elf, and thine O Helper of men,
 And ye wot that such a master no king shall see again;

And now would I foster Sigurd; for, though he be none of thy blood,
Mine heart of his days that shall be speaketh abundant good."

Then spake the Helper of men-folk: "Yea, do herein thy will:
For thou art the Master of Masters, and hast learned me all my skill:
But think how bright is this youngling, and thy guile from him withhold;
For this craft of thine hath shown me that thy heart is grim and cold,
Though three men's lives thrice over thy wisdom might not learn;
And I love this son of Sigmund, and mine heart to him doth yearn."

Then Regin laughed, and answered: "I doled out cunning to thee;
But nought with him will I measure: yet no cold-heart shall he be,
Nor grim, nor evil-natured: for whate'er my will might frame,
Gone forth is the word of the Norns, that abideth ever the same.
And now, despite my cunning, how deem ye I shall die?"

And they said he would live as he listed, and at last in peace should lie
When he listed to live no longer; so mighty and wise he was.

But again he laughed and answered: "One day it shall come to pass,
That a beardless youth shall slay me: I know the fateful doom;
But nought may I withstand it, as it heaves up dim through the gloom."

So is Sigurd now with Regin, and he learns him many things;
Yea, all save the craft of battle, that men learned the sons of kings:
The smithying sword and war-coat; the carving runes aright;
The tongues of many countries, and soft speech for men's delight;
The dealing with the harp-strings, and the winding ways of song.
So wise of heart waxed Sigurd, and of body wondrous strong:
And he chased the deer of the forest, and many a wood-wolf slew,
And many a bull of the mountains: and the desert dales he knew,
And the heaths that the wind sweeps over; and seaward would he fare,
Far out from the outer skerries, and alone the sea-wights dare.

On a day he sat with Regin amidst the unfashioned gold,
And the silver grey from the furnace; and Regin spake and told
Sweet tales of the days that have been, and the Kings of the bold and wise;
Till the lad's heart swelled with longing and lit his sunbright eyes.

Then Regin looked upon him: "Thou too shalt one day ride
As the Volsung Kings went faring through the noble world and wide.
For this land is nought and narrow, and Kings of the carles are these.
And their earls are acre-biders, and their hearts are dull with peace."

But Sigurd knit his brows, and in wrathful wise he said:
"Ill words of those thou speakest that my youth have cherished.
And the friends that have made me merry, and the land that is fair and good."

Then Regin laughed and answered: "Nay, well I see by thy mood
That wide wilt thou ride in the world like thy kin of the earlier days:
And wilt thou be wroth with thy master that he longs for thy winning the praise?
And now if the sooth thou sayest, that these King-folk cherish thee well,
Then let them give thee a gift whereof the world shall tell:
Yea hearken to this my counsel, and crave for a battle-steed."

Yet wroth was the lad and answered: "I have many a horse to my need,
And all that the heart desireth, and what wouldst thou wish me more?"

Then Regin answered and said: "Thy kin of the Kings of yore
Were the noblest men of men-folk; and their hearts would never rest
Whatso of good they had gotten, if their hands held not the best.
Now do thou after my counsel, and crave of thy fosterers here
That thou choose of the horses of Gripir whichso thine heart holds dear."

He spake and his harp was with him, and he smote the strings full sweet,
And sang of the host of the Valkyrs, how they ride the battle to meet,
And the dew from the dear manes drippeth as they ride in the first of the sun,
And the tree-boughs open to meet it when the wind of the dawning is done:
And the deep dales drink its sweetness and spring into blossoming grass,
And the earth groweth fruitful of men, and bringeth their glory to pass.

Then the wrath ran off from Sigurd, and he left the smithying stead
While the song yet rang in the doorway: and that eve to the Kings he said:
“Will ye do so much for mine asking as to give me a horse to my will?
For belike the days shall come, that shall all my heart fulfill,
And teach me the deeds of a king.”

Then answered King Elf and spake:

“The stalls of the Kings are before thee to set aside or to take,
And nought we begrudge thee the best.”

Yet answered Sigurd again;

For his heart of the mountains aloft and the windy drift was fain:

“Fair seats for the knees of Kings! but now do I ask for a gift
Such as all the world shall be praising, the best of the strong and the swift
Ye shall give me a token for Gripir, and bid him to let me choose
From out of the noble stud-beasts that run in his meadow loose.
But if overmuch I have asked you, forget this prayer of mine,
And deem the word unspoken, and get ye to the wine.”

Then smiled King Elf, and answered: “A long way wilt thou ride,
To where unpeace and troubles and the griefs of the soul abide,
Yea unto the death at the last: yet surely shalt thou win
The praise of many a people: so have thy way herein.
Forsooth no more may we hold thee than the hazel copse may hold
The sun of the early dawning, that turneth it all unto gold.”

Then sweetly Sigurd thanked them; and through the night he lay
Mid dreams of many a matter till the dawn was on the way;
Then he shook the sleep from off him, and that dwelling of Kings he left
And wended his ways unto Gripir. On a crag from the mountain reft
Was the house of the old King builded; and a mighty house it was,
Though few were the sons of men that over its threshold would pass:
But the wild ernes cried about it, and the vultures toward it flew,
And the winds from the heart of the mountains searched every chamber through,
And about were meads wide-spreading; and many a beast thereon,
Yea some that are men-folk’s terror, their sport and pasture won.

So into the hall went Sigurd; and amidst was Gripir set
In a chair of the sea-beast’s tooth; and his sweeping beard nigh met
The floor that was green as the ocean, and his gown was of mountain-gold,
And the kingly staff in his hand was knobbed with the crystal cold.

Now the first of the twain spake Gripir: “Hail King with the eyen bright!
Nought needest thou show the token, for I know of thy life and thy light.
And no need to tell of thy message; it was wafted here on the wind,
That thou wouldst be coming to-day a horse in my meadow to find:
And strong must he be for the bearing of those deeds of thine that shall be.
Now choose thou of all the way-wearers that are running loose in my lea,
And be glad as thine heart will have thee and the fate that leadeth thee on,
And I bid thee again come hither when the sword of worth is won,
And thy loins are girt for thy going on the road that before thee lies;
For a glimmering over its darkness is come before mine eyes.”

Then again gat Sigurd outward, and adown the steep he ran
And unto the horse-fed meadow: but lo, a grey-clad man,
One-eyed and seeming-ancient, there met him by the way:
And he spake: "Thou hastest, Sigurd; yet tarry till I say
A word that shall well bestead thee: for I know of these mountains well
And all the lea of Gripir, and the beasts that thereon dwell."
"Wouldst thou have red gold for thy tidings? art thou Gripir's horse-herd then?
Nay sure, for thy face is shining like the battle-eager men
My master Regin tells of: and I love thy cloud-grey gown.
And thy visage gleams above it like a thing my dreams have known."
"Nay whiles have I heeded the horse-kind," then spake that elder of days,
"And sooth do the sages say, when the beasts of my breeding they praise.
There is one thereof in the meadow, and, wouldst thou cull him out,
Thou shalt follow an elder's counsel, who hath brought strange things about,
Who hath known thy father aforetime, and other kings of thy kin."
So Sigurd said, "I am ready; and what is the deed to win?"
He said: "We shall drive the horses adown to the water-side,
That cometh forth from the mountains, and note what next shall betide."
Then the twain sped on together, and they drave the horses on
Till they came to a rushing river, a water wide and wan;
And the white mews hovered o'er it; but none might hear their cry
For the rush and the rattle of waters, as the downlong flood swept by.
So the whole herd took the river and strove the stream to stem,
And many a brave steed was there; but the flood o'ermastered them:
And some, it swept them down-ward, and some won back to bank,
Some, caught by the net of the eddies, in the swirling hubbub sank;
But one of all swam over, and they saw his mane of grey
Toss over the flowery meadows, a bright thing far away:
Wide then he wheeled about them, then took the stream again
And with the waves' white horses mingled his cloudy mane.
Then spake the elder of days: "Hearken now, Sigurd, and hear;
Time was when I gave thy father a gift thou shalt yet deem dear,
And this horse is a gift of my giving;—heed nought where thou mayst ride:
For I have seen thy fathers in a shining house abide,
And on earth they thought of its threshold, and the gifts I had to give;
Nor prayed for a little longer, and a little longer to live."
Then forth he strode to the mountains, and fain was Sigurd now
To ask him many a matter: but dim did his bright shape grow,
As a man from the litten doorway fades into the dusk of night;
And the sun in the high-noon shone, and the world was exceeding bright.
So Sigurd turned to the river and stood by the wave-wet strand,
And the grey horse swims to his feet and lightly leaps aland,
And the youngling looks upon him, and deems none beside him good.
And indeed, as tells the story, he was come of Sleipnir's blood,
The tireless horse of Odin: cloud-grey he was of hue,
And it seemed as Sigurd backed him that Sigmund's son he knew,
So glad he went beneath him. Then the youngling's song arose
As he brushed through the noon-tide blossoms of Gripir's mighty close,
Then he singeth the song of Greyfell, the horse that Odin gave,
Who swam through the sweeping river, and back through the toppling wave.

Regin telleth Sigurd of his kindred, and of the Gold that was accursed from ancient days.

Now yet the days pass over, and more than words may tell
 Grows Sigurd strong and lovely, and all children love him well.
 But oft he looks on the mountains and many a time is fain
 To know of what lies beyond them, and learn of the wide world's gain.
 And he saith: "I dwell in a land that is ruled by none of my blood;
 And my mother's sons are waxing, and fair kings shall they be and good;
 And their servant or their betrayer—not one of these will I be.
 Yet needs must I wait for a little till Odin calls for me."

Now again it happened on a day that he sat in Regin's hall
 And hearkened many tidings of what had chanced to fall,
 And of kings that sought their kingdoms o'er many a waste and wild,
 And at last saith the crafty master:
 "Thou art King Sigmund's child:
 Wilt thou wait till these kings of the carles shall die in a little land,
 Or wilt thou serve their sons and carry the cup to their hand;
 Or abide in vain for the day that never shall come about,
 When their banners shall dance in the wind and shake to the war-gods' shout?"

Then Sigurd answered and said: "Nought such do I look to be.
 But thou, a deedless man, too much thou eggest me:
 And these folk are good and trusty, and the land is lovely and sweet,
 And in rest and in peace it lieth as the floor of Odin's feet:
 Yet I know that the world is wide, and filled with deeds unwrought;
 And for e'en such work was I fashioned, lest the songcraft come to nought,
 When the harps of God-home tinkle, and the Gods are at stretch to hearken:
 Lest the hosts of the Gods be scanty when their day hath begun to darken,
 When the bonds of the Wolf wax thin, and Loki fretteth his chain.
 And sure for the house of my fathers full oft my heart is fain,
 And meseemeth I hear them talking of the day when I shall come,
 And of all the burden of deeds, that my hand shall bear them home.
 And so when the deed is ready, nowise the man shall lack:
 But the wary foot is the surest, and the hasty oft turns back."

Then answered Regin the guileful: "The deed is ready to hand,
 Yet holding my peace is the best, for well thou lovest the land;
 And thou lovest thy life moreover, and the peace of thy youthful days,
 And why should the full-fed feaster his hand to the rye-bread raise?
 Yet they say that Sigmund begat thee and he looked to fashion a man.
 Fear nought; he lieth quiet in his mound by the sea-waves wan."

So shone the eyes of Sigurd, that the shield against him hung
 Cast back their light as the sunbeams; but his voice to the roof-tree rung:
 "Tell me, thou Master of Masters, what deed is the deed I shall do?
 Nor mock thou the son of Sigmund lest the day of his birth thou rue."

Then answered the Master of Sleight: "The deed is the righting of wrong,
 And the quelling a bale and a sorrow that the world hath endured o'erlong,
 And the winning a treasure untold, that shall make thee more than the kings;
 Thereof is the Helm of Aweing, the wonder of earthly things,
 And thereof is its very fellow, the War-coat all of gold,
 That has not its like in the heavens, nor has earth of its fellow told."

Then answered Sigurd the Volsung: "How long hereof hast thou known?
 And what unto thee is this treasure, that thou seemest to give as thine own?"

"Alas!" quoth the smithying master, "it is mine, yet none of mine,
 Since my heart herein avails not, and my hand is frail and fine—
 It is long since I first came hither to seek a man for my need;
 For I saw by a glimmering light that hence would spring the deed,

And many a deed of the world: but the generations passed,
And the first of the days was as near to the end that I sought as the last;
Till I looked on thine eyes in the cradle: and now I deem through thee,
That the end of my days of waiting, and the end of my woes shall be."

Then Sigurd awhile was silent; but at last he answered and said:
"Thou shalt have thy will and the treasure, and shalt take the curse on thine head
If a curse the gold enwrappeth: but the deed will I surely do,
For today the dreams of my childhood hath bloomed in my heart anew:
And I long to look on the world and the glory of the earth
And to deal in the dealings of men, and garner the harvest of worth.
But tell me, thou Master of Masters, where lieth this measureless wealth;
Is it guarded by swords of the earl-folk, or kept by cunning and stealth?
Is it over the main sea's darkness, or beyond the mountain wall?
Or e'en in these peaceful acres anigh to the hands of all?"

Then Regin answered sweetly: "Hereof must a tale be told:
Bide sitting, thou son of Sigmund, on the heap of unwrought gold,
And hearken of wondrous matters, and of things unheard, unsaid,
And deeds of my beholding ere the first of Kings was made.

"And first ye shall know of a sooth, that I never was born of the race
Which the masters of God-home have made to cover the fair earth's face;
But I come of the Dwarfs departed; and fair was the earth whileome
Ere the short-lived thralls of the Gods amidst its dales were come:—
And how were we worse than the Gods, though maybe we lived not as long?
Yet no weight of memory maimed us; nor aught we knew of wrong.
What felt our souls of shaming, what knew our hearts of love?
We did and undid at pleasure, and repented nought thereof.
—Yea we were exceeding mighty—bear with me yet, my son;
For whiles can I scarcely think it that our days are wholly done.
And trust not thy life in my hands in the day when most I seem
Like the Dwarfs that are long departed, and most of my kindred I dream.

"So as we dwelt came tidings that the Gods amongst us were,
And the people came from Asgard: then rose up hope and fear,
And strange shapes of things went flitting betwixt the night and the eve,
And our sons waxed wild and wrathful, and our daughters learned to grieve.
Then we fell to the working of metal, and the deeps of the earth would know,
And we dealt with venom and leechcraft, and we fashioned spear and bow,
And we set the ribs to the oak-keel, and looked on the landless sea;
And the world began to be such-like as the Gods would have it to be.
In the womb of the woeful earth had they quickened the grief and the gold.

"It was Reidmar the Ancient begat me; and now was he waxen old,
And a covetous man and a king; and he bade, and I built him a hall,
And a golden glorious house; and thereto his sons did he call,
And he bade them be evil and wise, that his will through them might be wrought.
Then he gave unto Fafnir my brother the soul that feareth nought,
And the brow of the hardened iron, and the hand that may never fail,
And the greedy heart of a king, and the ear that hears no wail.

"But next unto Otter my brother he gave the snare and the net,
And the longing to wend through the wild-wood, and wade the highways wet:
And the foot that never resteth, while aught be left alive
That hath cunning to match man's cunning or might with his might to strive.

"And to me, the least and the youngest, what gift for the slaying of ease?
Save the grief that remembers the past, and the fear that the future sees;
And the hammer and fashioning-iron, and the living coal of fire;

And the craft that createth a semblance, and fails of the heart's desire;
 And the toil that each dawning quickens and the task that is never done;
 And the heart that longeth ever, nor will look to the deed that is won.

"Thus gave my father the gifts that might never be taken again;
 Far worse were we now than the Gods, and but little better than men.
 But yet of our ancient might one thing had we left us still:
 We had craft to change our semblance, and could shift us at our will
 Into bodies of the beast-kind, or fowl, or fishes cold;
 For belike no fixèd semblance we had in the days of old,
 Till the Gods were waxen busy, and all things their form must take
 That knew of good and evil, and longed to gather and make.

"So dwelt we, brethren and father; and Fafnir my brother fared
 As the scourge and compeller of all things, and left no wrong undared;
 But for me, I toiled and I toiled; and fair grew my father's house;
 But writhen and foul were the hands that had made it glorious;
 And the love of women left me, and the fame of sword and shield:
 And the sun and the winds of heaven, and the fowl and the grass of the field
 Were grown as the tools of my smithy; and all the world I knew,
 And the glories that lie beyond it, and whitherward all things drew;
 And myself a little fragment amidst it all I saw,
 Grim, cold-heart, and unmighty as the tempest-driven straw.
 —Let be.—For Otter my brother saw seldom field or fold,
 And he oftenest used that custom, whereof e'en now I told,
 And would shift his shape with the wood-beasts and the things of land and sea;
 And he knew what joy their hearts had, and what they longed to be,
 And their dim-eyed understanding, and his wood-craft waxed so great,
 That he seemed the king of the creatures and their very mortal fate.

"Now as the years won over three folk of the heavenly halls
 Grew aware of sleepless sloth, and the day that nought befalls;
 And they fain would look on the earth, and their latest handiwork,
 And turn the fine gold over, lest a flaw therein should lurk.
 And the three were the heart-wise Odin, the Father of the Slain,
 And Loki, the World's Begrudger, who maketh all labour vain,
 And Hænir, the Utter-Blameless, who wrought the hope of man,
 And his heart and inmost yearnings, when first the work began;—
 —The God that was aforetime, and hereafter yet shall be,
 When the new light yet undreamed of shall shine o'er earth and sea.

"Thus about the world they wended and deemed it fair and good,
 And they loved their life-days dearly: so came they to the wood,
 And the lea without a shepherd and the dwellings of the deer,
 And unto a mighty water that ran from a fathomless mere.
 Now that flood my brother Otter had haunted many a day
 For its plenteous fruit of fishes; and there on the bank he lay
 As the Gods came wandering thither; and he slept, and in his dreams
 He saw the downlong river, and its fishy-peopled streams,
 And the swift smooth heads of its forces, and its swirling wells and deep,
 Where hang the poisèd fishes, and their watch in the rock-halls keep.
 And so, as he thought of it all, and its deeds and its wanderings,
 Whereby it ran to the sea down the road of scaly things,
 His body was changed with his thought, as yet was the wont of our kind,
 And he grew but an Otter indeed; and his eyes were sleeping and blind
 The while he devoured the prey, a golden red-flecked trout.
 Then passed by Odin and Hænir, nor cumbered their souls with doubt;
 But Loki lingered a little, and guile in his heart arose,

And he saw through the shape of the Otter, and beheld a chief of his foes,
A king of the free and the careless: so he called up his baleful might,
And gathered his godhead together, and tore a shard outright
From the rock-wall of the river, and across its green wells cast;
And roaring over the waters that bolt of evil passed,
And smote my brother Otter that his heart's life fled away,
And bore his man's shape with it, and beast-like there he lay,
Stark dead on the sun-lit blossoms: but the Evil God rejoiced,
And because of the sound of his singing the wild grew many-voiced.

"Then the three Gods waded the river, and no word Hænir spake,
For his thoughts were set on God-home, and the day that is ever awake.
But Odin laughed in his wrath, and murmured: 'Ah, how long,
Till the iron shall ring on the anvil for the shackles of thy wrong!'

"Then Loki takes up the quarry, and is e'en as a man again;
And the three wend on through the wild-wood till they come to a grassy plain
Beneath the untrodden mountains; and lo a noble house,
And a hall with great craft fashioned, and made full glorious;
But night on the earth was falling; so scantily might they see
The wealth of its smooth-wrought stonework and its world of imagery:
Then Loki bade turn thither since day was at an end,
And into that noble dwelling the lords of God-home wend;
And the porch was fair and mighty, and so smooth-wrought was its gold,
That the mirrored stars of heaven therein might ye behold:
But the hall, what words shall tell it, how fair it rose aloft,
And the marvels of its windows, and its golden hangings soft,
And the forest of its pillars! and each like the wave's heart shone,
And the mirrored boughs of the garden were dancing fair thereon.
—Long years ago was it builded, and where are its wonders now?

"Now the men of God-home marvelled, and gazed through the golden glow,
And a man like a covetous king amidst of the hall they saw;
And his chair was the tooth of the whale, wrought smooth with never a flaw;
And his gown was the sea-born purple, and he bore a crown on his head,
But never a sword was before him: kind-seeming words he said,
And bade rest to the weary feet that had worn the wild so long.
So they sat, and were men by seeming; and there rose up music and song,
And they ate and drank and were merry: but amidst the glee of the cup
They felt themselves tangled and caught, as when the net cometh up
Before the folk of the firth, and the main sea lieth far off;
And the laughter of lips they hearkened, and that hall-abider's scoff,
As his face and his mocking eyes anigh to their faces drew,
And their godhead was caught in the net, and no shift of creation they knew
To escape from their man-like bodies; so great that day was the Earth.

"Then spake the hall-abider: 'Where then is thy guileful mirth,
And thy hall-glee gone, O Loki? Come, Hænir, fashion now
My heart for love and for hope, that the fear in my body may grow,
That I may grieve and be sorry, that the ruth may arise in me,
As thou dealtst with the first of men-folk, when a master-smith thou wouldst be.
And thou, Allfather Odin, hast thou come on a bastard brood?
Or hadst thou belike a brother, thy twin for evil and good,
That waked amidst thy slumber, and slumbered midst thy work?
Nay, Wise-one, art thou silent as a child amidst the mirk?
Ah, I know ye are called the Gods, and are mighty men at home,
But now with a guilt on your heads to no feeble folk are ye come,
To a folk that need you nothing: time was when we knew you not:

Yet e'en then fresh was the winter, and the summer sun was hot,
 And the wood-meats stayed our hunger, and the water quenched our thirst,
 Ere the good and the evil wedded and begat the best and the worst.
 And how if today I undo it, that work of your fashioning,
 If the web of the world run backward, and the high heavens lack a King?
 —Woe's me! for your ancient mastery shall help you at your need:
 If ye fill up the gulf of my longing and my empty heart of greed,
 And slake the flame ye have quickened, then may ye go your ways
 And get ye back to your kingship and the driving on of the days
 To the day of the gathered war-hosts, and the tide of your Fateful Gloom.
 Now nought may ye gainsay it that my mouth must speak the doom,
 For ye wot well I am Reidmar, and that there ye lie red-hand
 From the slaughtering of my offspring, and the spoiling of my land;
 For his death of my wold hath bereft me and every highway wet.
 —Nay, Loki, naught avails it, well-fashioned is the net.
 Come forth, my son, my war-god, and show the Gods their work,
 And thou who mightst learn e'en Loki, if need were to lie or lurk!'

"And there was I, I Regin, the smithier of the snare,
 And high up Fafnir towered with the brow that knew no fear,
 With the wrathful and pitiless heart that was born of my father's will,
 And the greed that the Gods had fashioned the fate of the earth to fulfill.

"Then spake the Father of Men: 'We have wrought thee wrong indeed,
 And, wouldst thou amend it with wrong, thine errand must we speed;
 For I know of thine heart's desire, and the gold thou shalt nowise lack,
 —Nor all the works of the gold. But best were thy word drawn back,
 If indeed the doom of the Norns be not utterly now gone forth.'

"Then Reidmar laughed and answered: 'So much is thy word of worth!
 And they call thee Odin for this, and stretch forth hands in vain,
 And pray for the gifts of a God who giveth and taketh again!
 It was better in times past over, when we prayed for nought at all,
 When no love taught us beseeching, and we had no troth to recall.
 Ye have changed the world, and it bindeth with the right and the wrong ye have made,
 Nor may ye be Gods henceforward save the rightful ransom be paid.
 But perchance ye are weary of kingship, and will deal no more with the earth?
 Then curse the world, and depart, and sit in your changeless mirth;
 And there shall be no more kings, and battle and murder shall fail,
 And the world shall laugh and long not, nor weep, nor fashion the tale.'

"So spake Reidmar the Wise; but the wrath burned through his word,
 And wasted his heart of wisdom; and there was Fafnir the Lord,
 And there was Regin the Wright, and they raged at their father's back:
 And all these cried out together with the voice of the sea-storm's wrack;
 'O hearken, Gods of the Goths! ye shall die, and we shall be Gods,
 And rule your men beloved with bitter-heavy rods,
 And make them beasts beneath us, save today ye do our will,
 And pay us the ransom of blood, and our hearts with the gold fulfill.'

"But Odin spake in answer, and his voice was awful and cold:
 'Give righteous doom, O Reidmar! say what ye will of the Gold!'

"Then Reidmar laughed in his heart, and his wrath and his wisdom fled,
 And nought but his greed abided; and he spake from his throne and said:

"Now hearken the doom I shall speak! Ye stranger-folk shall be free
 When ye give me the Flame of the Waters, the gathered Gold of the Sea,
 That Andvari hideth rejoicing in the wan realm pale as the grave;
 And the Master of Sleight shall fetch it, and the hand that never gave,

And the heart that begrudgeth for ever shall gather and give and rue.

—Lo this is the doom of the wise, and no doom shall be spoken anew.’

”Then Odin spake: ’It is well; the Curser shall seek for the curse;

And the Greedy shall cherish the evil—and the seed of the Great they shall nurse.’

“No word spake Reidmar the great, for the eyes of his heart were turned

To the edge of the outer desert, so sore for the gold he yearned.

But Loki lloosed from the toils, and he goeth his way abroad;

And the heart of Odin he knoweth, and where he shall seek the Hoard.

”There is a desert of dread in the uttermost part of the world,

Where over a wall of mountains is a mighty water hurled,

Whose hidden head none knoweth, nor where it meeteth the sea;

And that force is the Force of Andvari, and an Elf of the Dark is he.

In the cloud and the desert he dwelleth amid that land alone;

And his work is the storing of treasure within his house of stone.

Time was when he knew of wisdom, and had many a tale to tell

Of the days before the Dwarf-age, and of what in that world befell:

And he knew of the stars and the sun, and the worlds that come and go

On the nether rim of heaven, and whence the wind doth blow,

And how the sea hangs balanced betwixt the curving lands,

And how all drew together for the first Gods’ fashioning hands.

But now is all gone from him, save the craft of gathering gold,

And he heedeth nought of the summer, nor knoweth the winter cold,

Nor looks to the sun nor the snowfall, nor ever dreams of the sea,

Nor hath heard of the making of men-folk, nor of where the high Gods be

But ever he gripeth and gathereth, and he toileth hour by hour,

Nor knoweth the noon from the midnight as he looks on his stony bower,

And saith: ’It is short, it is narrow for all I shall gather and get;

For the world is but newly fashioned, and long shall its years be yet.’

“There Loki fareth, and seeth in a land of nothing good,

Far off o’er the empty desert, the reek of the falling flood

Go up to the floor of heaven, and thither turn his feet

As he weaveth the unseen meshes and the snare of strong deceit;

So he cometh his ways to the water, where the glittering foam-bow glows,

And the huge flood leaps the rock-wall and a green arch over it throws.

There under the roof of water he treads the quivering floor,

And the hush of the desert is felt amid the water’s roar,

And the bleak sun lighteth the wave-vault, and tells of the fruitless plain,

And the showers that nourish nothing, and the summer come in vain.

”There did the great Guile-master his toils and his tangles set,

And as wide as was the water, so wide was woven the net;

And as dim as the Elf’s remembrance did the meshes of it show;

And he had no thought of sorrow, nor spared to come and go

On his errands of griping and getting till he felt himself tangled and caught:

Then back to his blinded soul was his ancient wisdom brought,

And he saw his fall and his ruin, as a man by the lightning’s flame

Sees the garth all flooded by foemen; and again he remembered his name;

And e’en as a book well written the tale of the Gods he knew,

And the tale of the making of men, and much of the deeds they should do.

“But Loki took his man-shape, and laughed aloud and cried:

’What fish of the ends of the earth is so strong and so feeble-eyed,

That he draweth the pouch of my net on his road to the dwelling of Hell?

What Elf that hath heard the gold growing, but hath heard not the light winds tell

That the Gods with the world have been dealing and have fashioned men for the earth?

Where is he that hath ridden the cloud-horse and measured the ocean's girth,
But seen nought of the building of God-home nor the forging of the sword:
Where then is the maker of nothing, the earless and eyeless lord?
In the pouch of my net he lieth, with his head on the threshold of Hell!

"Then the Elf lamented, and said: 'Thou knowst of my name full well:
Andvari begotten of Oinn, whom the Dwarf-kind called the Wise,
By the worst of the Gods is taken, the forge and the father of lies.'

"Said Loki: 'How of the Elf-kind, do they love their latter life,
When their weal is all departed, and they lie alow in the strife?'

"Then Andvari groaned and answered: 'I know what thou wouldst have,
The wealth mine own hands gathered, the gold that no man gave.'

"Come forth,' said Loki, 'and give it, and dwell in peace henceforth—
Or die in the toils if thou listest, if thy life be nothing worth.'

"Full sore the Elf lamented, but he came before the God,
And the twain went into the rock-house and on fine gold they trod,
And the walls shone bright, and brighter than the sun of the upper air.
How great was that treasure of treasures: and the Helm of Dread was there;
The world but in dreams had seen it; and there was the hauberk of gold;
None other is in the heavens, nor has earth of its fellow told.

"Then Loki bade the Elf-king bring all to the upper day,
And he dight himself with his Godhead to bear the treasure away:
So there in the dim grey desert before the God of Guile,
Great heaps of the hid-world's treasure the weary Elf must pile,
And Loki looked on laughing: but, when it all was done,
And the Elf was hurrying homeward, his finger gleamed in the sun:
Then Loki cried: 'Thou art guileful: thou hast not learned the tale
Of the wisdom that Gods hath gotten and their might of all avail.
Hither to me! that I learn thee of a many things to come;
Or despite of all wilt thou journey to the dead man's deedless home.
Come hither again to thy master, and give the ring to me;
For meseems it is Loki's portion, and the Bale of Men shall it be.'

"Then the Elf drew off the gold-ring and stood with empty hand
E'en where the flood fell over 'twixt the water and the land,
And he gazed on the great Guile-master, and huge and grim he grew;
And his anguish swelled within him, and the word of the Norns he knew;
How that gold was the seed of gold to the wise and the shapers of things,
The hoarders of hidden treasure, and the unseen glory of rings;
But the seed of woe to the world and the foolish wasters of men,
And grief to the generations that die and spring again:
Then he cried:

'There fareest thou Loki, and might I load thee worse
Than with what thine ill heart beareth, then shouldst thou bear my curse:
But for men a curse thou bearest: entangled in my gold,
Amid my woe abideth another woe untold.

Two brethren and a father, eight kings my grief shall slay;
And the hearts of queens shall be broken, and their eyes shall loathe the day.
Lo, how the wilderness blossoms! Lo, how the lonely lands
Are waving with the harvest that fell from my gathering hands!'

"But Loki laughed in silence, and swift in Godhead went,
To the golden hall of Reidmar and the house of our content.
But when that world of treasure was laid within our hall
'Twas as if the sun were minded to live 'twixt wall and wall,
And all we stood by and panted. Then Odin spake and said:

”O Kings, O folk of the Dwarf-kind, lo, the ransom duly paid!
Will ye have this sun of the ocean, and reap the fruitful field,
And garner up the harvest that earth therefrom shall yield?”

“So he spake; but a little season nought answered Reidmar the wise,
But turned his face from the Treasure, and peered with eager eyes
Endlong the hall and athwart it, as a man may chase about
A ray of the sun of the morning that a naked sword throws out;
And lo from Loki’s right-hand came the flash of the fruitful ring,
And at last spake Reidmar scowling:
’Ye wait for my yea-saying
That your feet may go free on the earth, and the fear of my toils may be done
That then ye may say in your laughter: The fools of the time ago!
The purblind eyes of the Dwarf-kind! they have gotten the garnered sheaf
And have let their Masters depart with the Seed of Gold and of Grief:
O Loki, friend of Allfather, cast down Andvari’s ring,
Or the world shall yet turn backward and the high heavens lack a king.’

”Then Loki drew off the Elf-ring and cast it down on the heap,
And forth as the gold met gold did the light of its glory leap:
But he spake: ’It rejoiceth my heart that no whit of all ye shall lack,
Lest the curse of the Elf-king cleave not, and ye ’scape the utter wrack.’

“Then laughed and answered Reidmar: ’I shall have it while I live,
And that shall be long, meseemeth: for who is there may strive
With my sword, the war-wise Fafnir, and my shield that is Regin the Smith?
But if indeed I should die, then let men-folk deal therewith,
And ride to the golden glitter through evil deeds and good.
I will have my heart’s desire, and do as the high Gods would.’

”Then I loosed the Gods from their shackles, and great they grew on the floor
And into the night they gat them; but Odin turned by the door,
And we looked not, little we heeded, for we grudged his mastery;
Then he spake, and his voice was waxen as the voice of the winter sea:

“O Kings, O folk of the Dwarfs, why then will ye covet and rue?
I have seen your fathers’ fathers and the dust wherefrom they grew;
But who hath heard of my father or the land where first I sprung?
Who knoweth my day of repentance, or the year when I was young?
Who hath learned the names of the Wise-one or measured out his will?
Who hath gone before to teach him, and the doom of days fulfill?
Lo, I look on the Curse of the Gold, and wrong amended by wrong,
And love by love confounded, and the strong abased by the strong;
And I order it all and amend it, and the deeds that are done I see,
And none other beholdeth or knoweth; and who shall be wise unto me?
For myself to myself I offered, that all wisdom I might know,
And fruitful I waxed of works, and good and fair did they grow;
And I knew, and I wrought and fore-ordered; and evil sat by my side,
And myself by myself hath been doomed, and I look for the fateful tide;
And I deal with the generations, and the men mine hand hath made,
And myself by myself shall be grieved, lest the world and its fashioning fade.’

”They went and the Gold abided: but the words Allfather spake,
I call them back full often for that golden even’s sake,
Yet little that hour I heard them, save as wind across the lea;
For the gold shone up on Reidmar and on Fafnir’s face and on me.
And sore I loved that treasure: so I wrapped my heart in guile,
And sleeked my tongue with sweetness, and set my face in a smile,
And I bade my father keep it, the more part of the gold,

Yet give good store to Fafnir for his goodly help and bold,
 And deal me a little handful for my smithying-help that day.
 But no little I desired, though for little I might pray;
 And prayed I for much or for little, he answered me no more
 Than the shepherd answers the wood-wolf who howls at the yule-tide door:
 But good he ever deemed it to sit on his ivory throne,
 And stare on the red rings' glory, and deem he was ever alone:
 And never a word spake Fafnir, but his eyes waxed red and grim
 As he looked upon our father, and noted the ways of him.

"The night waned into the morning, and still above the Hoard
 Sat Reidmar clad in purple; but Fafnir took his sword,
 And I took my smithying-hammer, and apart in the world we went;
 But I came aback in the even, and my heart was heavy and spent;
 And I longed, but fear was upon me and I durst not go to the Gold;
 So I lay in the house of my toil mid the things I had fashioned of old;
 And methought as I lay in my bed 'twixt waking and slumber of night
 That I heard the tinkling metal and beheld the hall alight,
 But I slept and dreamed of the Gods, and the things that never have slept,
 Till I woke to a cry and a clashing and forth from the bed I leapt,
 And there by the heaped-up Elf-gold my brother Fafnir stood,
 And there at his feet lay Reidmar and reddened the Treasure with blood:
 And e'en as I looked on his eyen they glazed and whitened with death,
 And forth on the torch-litten hall he shed his latest breath.

"But I looked on Fafnir and trembled for he wore the Helm of Dread,
 And his sword was bare in his hand, and the sword and the hand were red
 With the blood of our father Reidmar, and his body was wrapped in gold,
 With the ruddy-gleaming mailcoat of whose fellow hath nought been told,
 And it seemed as I looked upon him that he grew beneath mine eyes:
 And then in the mid-hall's silence did his dreadful voice arise:

"I have slain my father Reidmar, that I alone might keep
 The Gold of the darksome places, the Candle of the Deep.
 I am such as the Gods have made me, lest the Dwarf-kind people the earth,
 Or mingle their ancient wisdom with its short-lived latest birth.
 I shall dwell alone henceforward, and the Gold and its waxing curse,
 I shall brood on them both together, let my life grow better or worse.
 And I am a King henceforward and long shall be my life,
 And the Gold shall grow with my longing, for I shall hide it from strife,
 And hoard up the Ring of Andvari in the house thine hand hath built.
 O thou, wilt thou tarry and tarry, till I cast thy blood on the guilt?
 Lo, I am a King for ever, and alone on the Gold shall I dwell
 And do no deed to repent of and leave no tale to tell."

"More awful grew his visage as he spake the word of dread,
 And no more durst I behold him, but with heart a-cold I fled;
 I fled from the glorious house my hands had made so fair,
 As poor as the new-born baby with nought of raiment or gear:
 I fled from the heaps of gold, and my goods were the eager will,
 And the heart that remembereth all, and the hand that may never be still.

"Then unto this land I came, and that was long ago
 As men-folk count the years; and I taught them to reap and to sow,
 And a famous man I became: but that generation died,
 And they said that Frey had taught them, and a God my name did hide.
 Then I taught them the craft of metals, and the sailing of the sea,
 And the taming of the horse-kind, and the yoke-beasts' husbandry,
 And the building up of houses; and that race of men went by,

And they said that Thor had taught them; and a smithying-carle was I.
Then I gave their maidens the needle and I bade them hold the rock,
And the shuttle-race gaped for them as they sat at the weaving-stock.
But by then these were waxen crones to sit dim-eyed by the door,
It was Freyia had come among them to teach the weaving-lore.
Then I taught them the tales of old, and fair songs fashioned and true,
And their speech grew into music of measured time and due,
And they smote the harp to my bidding, and the land grew soft and sweet:
But ere the grass of their grave-mounds rose up above my feet,
It was Bragi had made them sweet-mouthed, and I was the wandering scald;
Yet green did my cunning flourish by whatso name I was called,
And I grew the master of masters—Think thou how strange it is
That the sword in the hands of a stripling shall one day end all this!

”Yet oft mid all my wisdom did I long for my brother’s part,
And Fafnir’s mighty kingship weighed heavy on my heart
When the Kings of the earthly kingdoms would give me golden gifts
From out of their scanty treasures, due pay for my cunning shifts.
And once—didst thou number the years thou wouldst think it long ago—
I wandered away to the country from whence our stem did grow.
There methought the fells grown greater, but waste did the meadows lie,
And the house was rent and ragged and open to the sky.
But lo, when I came to the doorway, great silence brooded there,
Nor bat nor owl would haunt it, nor the wood-wolves drew anear.
Then I went to the pillared hall-stead, and lo, huge heaps of gold,
And to and fro amidst them a mighty Serpent rolled:
Then my heart grew chill with terror, for I thought on the wont of our race,
And I, who had lost their cunning, was a man in a deadly place,
A feeble man and a swordless in the lone destroyer’s fold;
For I knew that the Worm was Fafnir, the Wallower on the Gold.

”So I gathered my strength and fled, and hid my shame again
Mid the foolish sons of men-folk; and the more my hope was vain,
The more I longed for the Treasure, and deliv’rance from the yoke:
And yet passed the generations, and I dwelt with the short-lived folk.

”Long years, and long years after, the tale of men-folk told
How up on the Glittering Heath was the house and the dwelling of gold,
And within that house was the Serpent, and the Lord of the Fearful Face:
Then I wondered sore of the desert; for I thought of the golden place
My hands of old had builded; for I knew by many a sign
That the Fearful Face was my brother, that the blood of the Worm was mine.
This was ages long ago, and yet in that desert he dwells,
Betwixt him and men death lieth, and no man of his semblance tells;
But the tale of the great Gold-wallower is never the more outworn.
Then came thy kin, O Sigurd, and thy father’s father was born,
And I fell to the dreaming of dreams, and I saw thine eyes therein,
And I looked and beheld thy glory and all that thy sword should win;
And I thought that thou shouldst be he, who should bring my heart its rest,
That of all the gifts of the Kings thy sword should give me the best.

”Ah, I fell to the dreaming of dreams; and oft the gold I saw,
And the golden-fashioned Hauberk, clean-wrought without a flaw,
And the Helm that aweth the world; and I knew of Fafnir’s heart
That his wisdom was greater than mine, because he had held him apart,
Nor spilt on the sons of men-folk our knowledge of ancient days,
Nor bartered one whit for their love, nor craved for the people’s praise.

"And some day I shall have it all, his gold and his craft and his heart
 And the gathered and garnered wisdom he guards in the mountains apart
 And then when my hand is upon it, my hand shall be as the spring
 To thaw his winter away and the fruitful tide to bring.
 It shall grow, it shall grow into summer, and I shall be he that wrought,
 And my deeds shall be remembered, and my name that once was nought;
 Yea I shall be Frey, and Thor, and Freyia, and Bragi in one:
 Yea the God of all that is,—and no deed in the wide world done,
 But the deed that my heart would fashion: and the songs of the freed from the yoke
 Shall bear to my house in the heavens the love and the longing of folk.
 And there shall be no more dying, and the sea shall be as the land,
 And the world for ever and ever shall be young beneath my hand."
 Then his eyelids fell, and he slumbered, and it seemed as Sigurd gazed
 That the flames leapt up in the stithy and about the Master blazed,
 And his hand in the harp-strings wandered and the sweetness from them poured.
 Then unto his feet leapt Sigurd and drew his stripling's sword,
 And he cried: "Awake, O Master, for, lo, the day goes by,
 And this too is an ancient story, that the sons of men-folk die,
 And all save fame departeth. Awake! for the day grows late,
 And deeds by the door are passing, nor the Norns will have them wait."
 Then Regin groaned and wakened, sad-eyed and heavy-browed,
 And weary and worn was he waxen, as a man by a burden bowed:
 And he spake: "Hast thou hearkened, Sigurd, wilt thou help a man that is old
 To avenge him for his father? Wilt thou win that Treasure of Gold
 And be more than the Kings of the earth? Wilt thou rid the earth of a wrong
 And heal the woe and the sorrow my heart hath endured o'erlong?"
 Then Sigurd looked upon him with steadfast eyes and clear,
 And Regin drooped and trembled as he stood the doom to hear:
 But the bright child spake as aforetime, and answered the Master and said:
 "Thou shalt have thy will, and the Treasure, and take the curse on thine head."

Of the forging of the Sword that is called The Wrath of Sigurd.

Now again came Sigurd to Regin, and said: "Thou hast taught me a task
 Whereof none knoweth the ending: and a gift at thine hands I ask."
 Then answered Regin the Master: "The world must be wide indeed
 If my hand may not reach across it for aught thine heart may need."
 "Yea wide is the world," said Sigurd, "and soon spoken is thy word;
 But this gift thou shalt nought gainsay me: for I bid thee forge me a sword."
 Then spake the Master of Masters, and his voice was sweet and soft:
 "Look forth abroad, O Sigurd, and note in the heavens aloft
 How the dim white moon of the daylight hangs round as the Goth-God's shield,
 Now for thee first rang mine anvil when she walked the heavenly field
 A slim and lovely lady, and the old moon lay on her arm:
 Lo, here is a sword I have wrought thee with many a spell and charm
 And all the craft of the Dwarf-kind; be glad thereof and sure;
 Mid many a storm of battle full well shall it endure."
 Then Sigurd looked on the slayer, and never a word would speak:
 Gemmed were the hilts and golden, and the blade was blue and bleak,
 And runes of the Dwarf-kind's cunning each side the trench were scored:
 But soft and sweet spake Regin: "How likest thou the sword?"
 Then Sigurd laughed and answered: "The work is proved by the deed;
 See now if this be a traitor to fail me in my need."

Then Regin trembled and shrank, so bright his eyes outshone
As he turned about to the anvil, and smote the sword thereon;
But the shards fell shivering earthward, and Sigurd's heart grew wroth
As the steel-flakes tinkled about him: "Lo, there the right-hand's troth!
Lo, there the golden glitter, and the word that soon is spilt."
And down amongst the ashes he cast the glittering hilt,
And turned his back on Regin and strode out through the door,
And for many a day of spring-tide came back again no more.
But at last he came to the stithy and again took up the word:
"What hast thou done, O Master, in the forging of the sword?"

Then sweetly Regin answered: "Hard task-master art thou,
But lo, a blade of battle that shall surely please thee now!
Two moons are clean departed since thou lookedst toward the sky
And sawest the dim white circle amid the cloud-flecks lie;
And night and day have I laboured; and the cunning of old days
Hath surely left my right-hand if this sword thou shalt not praise."

And indeed the hilts gleamed glorious with many a dear-bought stone,
And down the fallow edges the light of battle shone;
Yet Sigurd's eyes shone brighter, nor yet might Regin face
Those eyes of the heart of the Volsungs; but trembled in his place
As Sigurd cried: "O Regin, thy kin of the days of old
Were an evil and treacherous folk, and they lied and murdered for gold;
And now if thou wouldst betray me, of the ancient curse beware,
And set thy face as the flint the bale and the shame to bear:
For he that would win to the heavens, and be as the Gods on high,
Must tremble nought at the road, and the place where men-folk die."

White leaps the blade in his hand and gleams in the gear of the wall,
And he smites, and the oft-smitten edges on the beaten anvil fall:
But the life of the sword departed, and dull and broken it lay
On the ashes and flaked-off iron, and no word did Sigurd say,
But strode off through the door of the stithy and went to the Hall of Kings,
And was merry and blithe that even mid all imaginings.

But when the morrow was come he went to his mother and spake:
"The shards, the shards of the sword, that thou gleanedst for my sake
In the night on the field of slaughter, in the tide when my father fell,
Hast thou kept them through sorrow and joyance? hast thou warded them trusty and well?
Where hast thou laid them, my mother?"

Then she looked upon him and said:

"Art thou wroth, O Sigurd my son, that such eyes are in thine head?
And wilt thou be wroth with thy mother? do I withstand thee at all?"

"Nay," said he, "nought am I wrathful, but the days rise up like a wall
Betwixt my soul and the deeds, and I strive to rend them through.
And why wilt thou fear mine eyen? as the sword lies baleful and blue
E'en 'twixt the lips of lovers, when they swear their troth thereon,
So keen are the eyes ye have fashioned, ye folk of the days ago;
For therein is the light of battle, though whiles it lieth asleep.
Now give me the sword, my mother, that Sigmund gave thee to keep."

She said: "I shall give it thee gladly, for fain shall I be of thy praise
When thou knowest my careful keeping of that hope of the earlier days."

So she took his hand in her hand, and they went their ways, they twain;
Till they came to the treasure of queen-folk, the guarded chamber of gain:
They were all alone with its riches, and she turned the key in the gold,
And lifted the sea-born purple, and the silken web unrolled,

And lo, 'twixt her hands and her bosom the shards of Sigmund's sword;
 No rust-fleck stained its edges, and the gems of the ocean's hoard
 Were as bright in the hilts and glorious, as when in the Volsungs' hall
 It shone in the eyes of the earl-folk and flashed from the shielded wall.

But Sigurd smiled upon it, and he said: "O Mother of Kings,
 Well hast thou warded the war-glaive for a mirror of many things,
 And a hope of much fulfilment: well hast thou given to me
 The message of my fathers, and the word of thing to be:
 Trusty hath been thy warding, but its hour is over now:
 These shards shall be knit together, and shall hear the war-wind blow.
 They shall shine through the rain of Odin, as the sun come back to the world,
 When the heaviest bolt of the thunder amidst the storm is hurled:
 They shall shake the thrones of Kings, and shear the walls of war,
 And undo the knot of treason when the world is darkening o'er.
 They have shone in the dusk and the night-tide, they shall shine in the dawn and the day;
 They have gathered the storm together, they shall chase the clouds away;
 They have sheared red gold asunder, they shall gleam o'er the garnered gold
 They have ended many a story, they shall fashion a tale to be told:
 They have lived in the wrack of the people; they shall live in the glory of folk
 They have stricken the Gods in battle, for the Gods shall they strike the stroke."

Then she felt his hands about her as he took the fateful sword,
 And he kissed her soft and sweetly; but she answered never a word:
 So great and fair was he waxen, so glorious was his face,
 So young, as the deathless Gods are, that long in the golden place
 She stood when he was departed: as some for-travailed one
 Comes over the dark fell-ridges on the birth-tide of the sun,
 And his gathering sleep falls from him mid the glory and the blaze;
 And he sees the world grow merry and looks on the lightened ways,
 While the ruddy streaks are melting in the day-flood broad and white;
 Then the morn-dusk he forgetteth, and the moon-lit waste of night,
 And the hall whence he departed with its yellow candles' flare:
 So stood the Isle-king's daughter in that treasure-chamber fair.

But swift on his ways went Sigurd, and to Regin's house he came,
 Where the Master stood in the doorway and behind him leapt the flame,
 And dark he looked and little: no more his speech was sweet,
 No words on his lip were gathered the Volsung child to greet,
 Till he took the sword from Sigurd and the shards of the days of old;
 Then he spake:

"Will nothing serve thee save this blue steel and cold,
 The bane of thy father's father, the fate of all his kin,
 The baleful blade I fashioned, the Wrath that the Gods would win?"

Then answered the eye-bright Sigurd: "If thou thy craft wilt do
 Nought save these battle-gleanings shall be my helper true:
 And what if thou begrudgest, and my battle-blade be dull,
 Yet the hand of the Norns is lifted and the cup is over-full.
 Repentst thou ne'er so sorely that thy kin must lie alow,
 How much soe'er thou longest the world to overthrow,
 And, doubting the gold and the wisdom, wouldst even now appease
 Blind hate and eyeless murder, and win the world with these;
 O'er-late is the time for repenting the word thy lips have said:
 Thou shalt have the Gold and the wisdom and take its curse on thine head.
 I say that thy lips have spoken, and no more with thee it lies
 To do the deed or leave it: since thou hast shown mine eyes
 The world that was aforetime, I see the world to be;

And woe to the tangling thicket, or the wall that hindereth me!
And short is the space I will tarry; for how if the Worm should die
Ere the first of my strokes be stricken? Wilt thou get to thy mastery
And knit these shards together that once in the Branstock stood?
But if not and a smith's hands fail me, a king's hand yet shall be good;
And the Norns have doomed thy brother. And yet I deem this sword
Is the slayer of the Serpent, and the scatterer of the Hoard."

Great waxed the gloom of Regin, and he said: "Thou sayest sooth,
For none may turn him backward: the sword of a very youth
Shall one day end my cunning, as the Gods my joyance slew,
When nought thereof they were deeming, and another thing would do.
But this sword shall slay the Serpent; and do another deed,
And many an one thereafter till it fail thee in thy need.
But as fair and great as thou standeth, yet get thee from mine house,
For in me too might ariseth, and the place is perilous
With the craft that was aforetime, and shall never be again,
When the hands that have taught thee cunning have failed from the world of men.
Thou art wroth; but thy wrath must slumber till fate its blossom bear;
Not thus were the eyes of Odin when I held him in the snare.
Depart! lest the end overtake us ere thy work and mine be done,
But come again in the night-tide and the slumber of the sun,
When the sharded moon of April hangs round in the undark May."

Hither and thither a while did the heart of Sigurd sway;
For he feared no craft of the Dwarf-kind, nor heeded the ways of Fate,
But his hand wrought e'en as his heart would: and now was he weary with hate
Of the hatred and scorn of the Gods, and the greed of gold and of gain,
And the weaponless hands of the stripling of the wrath and the rending were fain.
But there stood Regin the Master, and his eyes were on Sigurd's eyes,
Though nought belike they beheld him, and his brow was sad and wise;
And the greed died out of his visage and he stood like an image of old.

So the Norns drew Sigurd away, and the tide was an even of gold,
And sweet in the April even were the fowl-kind singing their best;
And the light of life smote Sigurd, and the joy that knows no rest,
And the fond unnamed desire, and the hope of hidden things;
And he wended fair and lovely to the house of the feasting Kings.

But now when the moon was at full and the undark May begun,
Went Sigurd unto Regin mid the slumber of the sun,
And amidst the fire-hall's pavement the King of the Dwarf-kind stood
Like an image of deeds departed and days that once were good;
And he seemed but faint and weary, and his eyes were dim and dazed
As they met the glory of Sigurd where the fitful candles blazed.

Then he spake:

"Hail, Son of the Volsungs, the corner-stone is laid,
I have toiled and thou hast desired, and, lo, the fateful blade!"

Then Sigurd saw it lying on the ashes slaked and pale,
Like the sun and the lightning mingled mid the even's cloudy bale,
For ruddy and great were the hilts, and the edges fine and wan,
And all adown to the blood-point a very flame there ran
That swallowed the runes of wisdom wherewith its sides were scored.
No sound did Sigurd utter as he stooped adown for his sword,
But it seemed as his lips were moving with speech of strong desire.
White leapt the blade o'er his head, and he stood in the ring of its fire
As hither and thither it played, till it fell on the anvil's strength,
And he cried aloud in his glory, and held out the sword full length,

As one who would show it the world; for the edges were dulled no whit,
 And the anvil was cleft to the pavement with the dreadful dint of it.
 But Regin cried to his harp-strings: "Before the days of men
 I smithied the Wrath of Sigurd, and now is it smithied again:
 And my hand alone hath done it, and my heart alone hath dared
 To bid that man to the mountain, and behold his glory bared.
 Ah, if the son of Sigmund might wot of the thing I would,
 Then how were the ages bettered, and the world all waxen good!
 Then how were the past forgotten and the weary days of yore,
 And the hope of man that dieth and the waste that never bore!
 How should this one live through the winter and know of all increase!
 How should that one spring to the sunlight and bear the blossom of peace!
 No more should the long-lived wisdom o'er the waste of the wilderness stray;
 Nor the clear-eyed hero hasten to the deedless ending of day.
 And what if the hearts of the Volsungs for this deed of deeds were born,
 How then were their life-days evil and the end of their lives forlorn?"

There stood Sigurd the Volsung, and heard how the harp-strings rang,
 But of other things they told him than the hope that the Master sang;
 And his world lay far away from the Dwarf-king's eyeless realm
 And the road that leadeth nowhere, and the ship without a helm:
 But he spake: "How oft shall I say it, that I shall work thy will?
 If my father hath made me mighty, thine heart shall I fulfill
 With the wisdom and gold thou wouldest, before I wend on my ways;
 For now hast thou failed me nought, and the sword is the wonder of days."

No word for a while spake Regin; but he hung his head adown
 As a man that pondereth sorely, and his voice once more was grown
 As the voice of the smithying-master as he spake: "This Wrath of thine
 Hath cleft the hard and the heavy; it shall shear the soft and the fine:
 Come forth to the night and prove it."
 So they twain went forth abroad,
 And the moon lay white on the river and lit the sleepless ford,
 And down to its pools they wended, and the stream was swift and full;
 Then Regin cast against it a lock of fine-spun wool,
 And it whirled about on the eddy till it met the edges bared,
 And as clean as the careless water the laboured fleece was sheared.
 Then Regin spake: "It is good, what the smithying-carle hath wrought:
 Now the work of the King beginneth, and the end that my soul hath sought.
 Thou shalt toil and I shall desire, and the deed shall be surely done:
 For thy Wrath is alive and awake and the story of bale is begun."
 Therewith was the Wrath of Sigurd laid soft in a golden sheath
 And the peace-strings knit around it; for that blade was fain of death;
 And 'tis ill to show such edges to the broad blue light of day,
 Or to let the hall-glare light them, if ye list not play the play.

Of Gripir's Foretelling.

Now Sigurd backeth Greyfell on the first of the morrow morn,
 And he rideth fair and softly through the acres of the corn;
 The Wrath to his side is girded, but hid are the edges blue,
 As he wendeth his ways to the mountains, and rideth the horse-mead through.
 His wide grey eyes are happy, and his voice is sweet and soft,
 As amid the mead-lark's singing he casteth song aloft:
 Lo, lo, the horse and the rider! So once maybe it was,

When over the Earth unpeopled the youngest God would pass;
But never again meseemeth shall such a sight betide,
Till over a world unwrongful new-born shall Baldur ride.

So he comes to that ness of the mountains, and Gripir's garden steep,
That bravely Greyfell breasteth, and adown by the door doth he leap
And his war-gear rattleth upon him; there is none to ask or forbid
As he wendeth the house clear-lighted, where no mote of the dust is hid,
Though the sunlight hath not entered: the walls are clear and bright,
For they cast back each to other the golden Sigurd's light;
Through the echoing ways of the house bright-eyed he wendeth along,
And the mountain-wind is with him, and the hovering eagles' song;
But no sound of the children of men may the ears of the Volsung hear,
And no sign of their ways in the world, or their will, or their hope or their fear.

So he comes to the hall of Gripir, and gleaming-green is it built
As the house of under-ocean where the wealth of the greedy is spilt;
Gleaming and green as the sea, and rich as its rock-strewn floor,
And fresh as the autumn morning when the burning of summer is o'er.
There he looks and beholdeth the high-seat, and he sees it strangely wrought,
Of the tooth of the sea-beast fashioned ere the Dwarf-kind came to nought;
And he looks, and thereon is Gripir, the King exceeding old,
With the sword of his fathers girded, and his raiment wrought of gold;
With the ivory rod in his right-hand, with his left on the crystal laid,
That is round as the world of men-folk, and after its image made,
And clear is it wrought to the eyen that may read therein of Fate,
Though little indeed be its sea, and its earth not wondrous great.

There Sigurd stands in the hall, on the sheathèd Wrath doth he lean.
All his golden light is mirrored in the gleaming floor and green;
But the smile in his face upriseth as he looks on the ancient King,
And their glad eyes meet and their laughter, and sweet is the welcoming:
And Gripir saith: "Hail Sigurd! for my bidding hast thou done,
And here in the mountain-dwelling are two Kings of men alone."

But Sigurd spake: "Hail father! I am girt with the fateful sword
And my face is set to the highway, and I come for thy latest word."

Said Gripir: "What wouldst thou hearken ere we sit and drink the wine?"
"Thy word and the Norns'," said Sigurd, "but never a word of mine."
"What sights wouldst thou see," said Gripir, "ere mine hand shall take thine hand?"
"As the Gods would I see," said Sigurd, "though Death light up the land."
"What hope wouldst thou hope, O Sigurd, ere we kiss, we twain, and depart?"
"Thy hope and the Gods'," said Sigurd, "though the grief lie hard on my heart."

Nought answered the ancient wise-one, and not a whit had he stirred
Since the clash of Sigurd's raiment in his mountain-hall he heard;
But the ball that imaged the earth was set in his hand grown old;
And belike it was to his vision, as the wide-world's ocean rolled,
And the forests waved with the wind, and the corn was gay with the lark,
And the gold in its nether places grew up in the dusk and the dark,
And its children built and departed, and its King-folk conquered and went,
As over the crystal image his all-wise face was bent:
For all his desire was dead, and he lived as a God shall live,
Whom the prayers of the world hath forgotten, and to whom no hand may give.

But there stood the mighty Volsung, and leaned on the hidden Wrath;
As the earliest sun's uprising o'er the sea-plain draws a path

Whereby men sail to the Eastward and the dawn of another day,
So the image of King Sigurd on the gleaming pavement lay.

Then great in the hall fair-pillared the voice of Gripir arose,
And it ran through the glimmering house-ways, and forth to the sunny close;
There mid the birds' rejoicing went the voice of an o'er-wise King
Like a wind of midmost winter come back to talk with spring.

But the voice cried: "Sigurd, Sigurd! O great, O early born!
O hope of the Kings first fashioned! O blossom of the morn!
Short day and long remembrance, fair summer of the North!
One day shall the worn world wonder how first thou wentest forth!

"Arise, O Sigurd, Sigurd! In the night arise and go,
Thou shalt smite when the day-dawn glimmers through the folds of God-home's foe:

"There the child in the noon-tide smiteth; the young King rendeth apart,
The old guile by the guile encompassed, the heart made wise by the heart.

"Bind the red rings, O Sigurd; bind up to cast abroad!
That the earth may laugh before thee rejoiced by the Waters' Hoard.

"Ride on, O Sigurd, Sigurd! for God's word goes forth on the wind,
And he speaketh not twice over; nor shall they loose that bind:
But the Day and the Day shall loosen, and the Day shall awake and arise,
And the Day shall rejoice with the Dawning, and the wise heart learn of the wise.

"O fair, O fearless, O mighty, how green are the garths of Kings,
How soft are the ways before thee to the heart of their war-farings!

"How green are the garths of King-folk, how fair is the lily and rose
In the house of the Cloudy People, 'neath the towers of kings and foes!

"Smite now, smite now in the noontide! ride on through the hosts of men!
Lest the dear remembrance perish, and today come not again.

"Is it day?—But the house is darkling—But the hand would gather and hold,
And the lips have kissed the cloud-wreath, and a cloud the arms enfold.

"In the dusk hath the Sower arisen; in the dark hath he cast the seed,
And the ear is the sorrow of Odin and the wrong, and the nameless need!

"Ah the hand hath gathered and garnered, and empty is the hand,
Though the day be full and fruitful mid the drift of the Cloudy Land!

"Look, look on the drift of the clouds, how the day and the even doth grow
As the long-forgotten dawning that was a while ago!

"Dawn, dawn, O mighty of men! and why wilt thou never awake,
When the holy field of the Goth-folk cries out for thy love and thy sake?

"Dawn, now; but the house is silent, and dark is the purple blood
On the breast of the Queen fair-fashioned; and it riseth up as a flood
Round the posts of the door belovèd; and a deed there lieth therein:
The last of the deeds of Sigurd; the worst of the Cloudy Kin—
The slayer slain by the slain within the door and without.
—O dawn as the eve of the birth-day! O dark world cumbered with doubt!

"Shall it never be day any more, nor the sun's uprising and growth?
Shall the kings of earth lie sleeping and the war-dukes wander in sloth
Through the last of the winter twilight? is the word of the wise-ones said
Till the five-fold winter be ended and the trumpet waken the dead?

"Short day and long remembrance! great glory for the earth!
O deeds of the Day triumphant! O word of Sigurd's worth!
It is done, and who shall undo it of all who were ever alive?
May the Gods or the high Gods' masters 'gainst the tale of the righteous strive,

And the deeds to follow after, and all their deeds increase,
Till the uttermost field is foughten, and Baldur riseth in peace!
"Cry out, O waste, before him! O rocks of the wilderness, cry!
For tomorn shalt thou see the glory, and the man not made to die!
Cry out, O upper heavens! O clouds beneath the lift!
For the golden King shall be riding high-headed midst the drift:
The mountain waits and the fire; there waiteth the heart of the wise
Till the earthly toil is accomplished, and again shall the fire arise;
And none shall be nigh in the ending and none by his heart shall be laid,
Save the world that he cherished and quickened, and the Day that he wakened and made."

So died the voice of Gripir from amidst the sunny close,
And the sound of hastening eagles from the mountain's feet arose,
But the hall was silent a little, for still stood Sigmund's son,
And he heard the words and remembered, and knew them one by one.
Then he turned on the ancient Gripir with eyes that knew no guile
And smiled on the wise of King-folk as the first of men might smile
On the God that hath fashioned him happy; and he spake:
"Hast thou spoken and known
How there standeth a child before thee and a stripling scarcely grown?
Or hast thou told of the Volsungs, and the gathered heart of these,
And their still unquenched desire for garnering fame's increase?
E'en so do I hearken thy words: for I wot how they deem it long
Till a man from their seed be arisen to deal with the cumber and wrong.
Bid me therefore to sit by thy side, for behold I wend on my way,
And the gates swing-to behind me, and each day of mine is a day
With deeds in the eve and the morning, nor deeds shall the noontide lack;
To the right and the left none calleth, and no voice crieth aback."

"Come, kin of the Gods," said Gripir, "come up and sit by my side,
That we twain may be glad as the fearless, and they that have nothing to hide:
I have wrought out my will and abide it, and I sit ungrieved and alone,
I look upon men and I help not; to me are the deeds long done
As those of today and tomorrow: for these and for those am I glad;
But the Gods and men are the framers, and the days of my life I have had."

Then Sigurd came unto Gripir, and he kissed the wise-one's face,
And they sat in the high-seat together, the child and the elder of days;
And they drank of the wine of King-folk, and were joyful each of each,
And spake for a while of matters that are meet for King-folk's speech;
The deeds of men that have been and Kin of the Kings of the earth;
And Gripir told of the outlands, and the mid-world's billowy girth,
And tales of the upper heaven were mingled with his talk,
And the halls where the Sea-Queen's kindred o'er the gem-strewn pavement walk,
And the innermost parts of the earth, where they lie, the green and the blue,
And the red and the glittering gem-stones that of old the Dwarf-kind knew.

Long Sigurd sat and marvelled at the mouth that might not lie,
And the eyes no God had blinded, and the lone heart raised on high,
Then he rose from the gleaming high-seat, and the rings of battle rang
And the sheathed Wrath was hearkening and a song of war it sang,
But Sigurd spake unto Gripir:
"Long and lovely are thy days,
And thy years fulfilled of wisdom, and thy feet on the unhid ways,
And the guileless heart of the great that knoweth not anger nor pain:
So once hath a man been fashioned and shall not be again.
But for me hath been foaled the war-horse, the grey steed swift as the cloud,
And for me were the edges smithied, and the Wrath cries out aloud;

And a voice hath called from the darkness, and I ride to the Glittering Heath;
 To smite on the door of Destruction, and waken the warder of Death."
 So they kissed, the wise and the wise, and the child from the elder turned;
 And again in the glimmering house-ways the golden Sigurd burned;
 He stood outside in the sunlight, and tarried never a deal,
 But leapt on the cloudy Greyfell with the clank of gold and steel,
 And he rode through the sinking day to the walls of the kingly stead,
 And came to Regin's dwelling when the wind was fallen dead,
 And the great sun just departing: then blood-red grew the west,
 And the fowl flew home from the sea-mead, and all things sank to rest.

Sigurd rideth to the Glittering Heath.

Again on the morrow morning doth Sigurd the Volsung ride,
 And Regin, the Master of Masters, is faring by his side,
 And they leave the dwelling of kings and ride the summer land,
 Until at the eve of the day the hills are on either hand:
 Then they wend up higher and higher, and over the heaths they fare
 Till the moon shines broad on the midnight, and they sleep 'neath the heavens bare;
 And they waken and look behind them, and lo, the dawning of day
 And the little land of the Helper and its valleys far away;
 But the mountains rise before them, a wall exceeding great.
 Then spake the Master of Masters: "We have come to the garth and the gate:
 There is youth and rest behind thee and many a thing to do,
 There is many a fond desire, and each day born anew;
 And the land of the Volsungs to conquer, and many a people's praise:
 And for me there is rest it maybe, and the peaceful end of days.
 We have come to the garth and the gate; to the hall-door now shall we win,
 Shall we go to look on the high-seat and see what sitteth therein?"
 "Yea, and what else?" said Sigurd, "was thy tale but mockeries,
 And have I been drifted hither on a wind of empty lies?"
 "It was sooth, it was sooth," said Regin, "and more might I have told
 Had I heart and space to remember the deeds of the days of old."
 And he hung down his head as he spake it, and was silent a little space;
 And when it was lifted again there was fear in the Dwarf-king's face.
 And he said: "Thou knowest my thought, and wise-hearted art thou grown:
 It were well if thine eyes were blinder, and we each were faring alone,
 And I with my eld and my wisdom, and thou with thy youth and thy might;
 Yet whiles I dream I have wrought thee, a beam of the morning bright,
 A fatherless motherless glory, to work out my desire;
 Then high my hope ariseth, and my heart is all afire
 For the world I behold from afar, and the day that yet shall be;
 Then I wake and all things I remember and a youth of the Kings I see—
 —The child of the Wood-abider, the seed of a conquered King,
 The sword that the Gods have fashioned, the fate that men shall sing:—
 Ah might the world run backward to the days of the Dwarfs of old,
 When I hewed out the pillars of crystal, and smoothed the walls of gold!"
 Nought answered the Son of Sigmund; nay he heard him nought at all,
 Save as though the wind were speaking in the bights of the mountain-hall:
 But he leapt aback of Greyfell, and the glorious sun rose up,
 And the heavens glowed above him like the bowl of Baldur's cup,
 And a golden man was he waxen; as the heart of the sun he seemed,
 While over the feet of the mountains like blood the new light streamed;

Then Sigurd cried to Greyfell and swift for the pass he rode,
And Regin followed after as a man bowed down by a load.
Day-long they fared through the mountains, and that highway's fashioner
Forsooth was a fearful craftsman, and his hands the waters were,
And the heaped-up ice was his mattock, and the fire-blast was his man,
And never a whit he heeded though his walls were waste and wan,
And the guest-halls of that wayside great heaps of the ashes spent
But, each as a man alone, through the sun-bright day they went,
And they rode till the moon rose upward, and the stars were small and fair,
Then they slept on the long-slaked ashes beneath the heavens bare;
And the cold dawn came and they wakened, and the King of the Dwarf-kind seemed
As a thing of that wan land fashioned; but Sigurd glowed and gleamed
Amid the shadowless twilight by Greyfell's cloudy flank,
As a little space they abided while the latest star-world shrank;
On the backward road looked Regin and heard how Sigurd drew
The girths of Greyfell's saddle, and the voice of his sword he knew,
And he feared to look on the Volsung, as thus he fell to speak:
"I have seen the Dwarf-folk mighty, I have seen the God-folk weak;
And now, though our might be minished, yet have we gifts to give.
When men desire and conquer, most sweet is their life to live;
When men are young and lovely there is many a thing to do.
And sweet is their fond desire and the dawn that springs anew."
"This gift," said the Son of Sigmund, "the Norns shall give me yet,
And no blossom slain by the sunshine while the leaves with dew are wet."
Then Regin turned and beheld him: "Thou shalt deem it hard and strange,
When the hand hath encompassed it all, and yet thy life must change.
Ah, long were the lives of men-folk, if betwixt the Gods and them
Were mighty warders watching mid the earth's and the heaven's hem!
Is there any man so mighty he would cast this gift away,—
The heart's desire accomplished, and life so long a day,
That the dawn should be forgotten ere the even was begun?"
Then Sigurd laughed and answered: "Fare forth, O glorious sun;
Bright end from bright beginning, and the mid-way good to tell,
And death, and deeds accomplished, and all remembered well!
Shall the day go past and leave us, and we be left with night,
To tread the endless circle, and strive in vain to smite?
But thou—wilt thou still look backward? thou sayst I know thy thought:
Thou hast whetted the sword for the slaying, it shall turn aside for nought.
Fear not! with the Gold and the wisdom thou shalt deem thee God alone,
And mayst do and undo at pleasure, nor be bound by right nor wrong:
And then, if no God I be waxen, I shall be the weak with the strong."
And his war-gear clanged and tinkled as he leapt to the saddle-stead:
And the sun rose up at their backs and the grey world changed to red,
And away to the west went Sigurd by the glory wreathed about,
But little and black was Regin as a fire that dieth out.
Day-long they rode the mountains by the crags exceeding old,
And the ash that the first of the Dwarf-kind found dull and quenched and cold.
Then the moon in the mid-sky swam, and the stars were fair and pale,
And beneath the naked heaven they slept in an ash-grey dale;
And again at the dawn-dusk's ending they stood upon their feet,
And Sigurd donned his war-gear nor his eyes would Regin meet.
A clear streak widened in heaven low down above the earth;
And above it lay the cloud-flecks, and the sun, anigh its birth,

Unseen, their hosts was staining with the very hue of blood,
And ruddy by Greyfell's shoulder the Son of Sigmund stood.

Then spake the Master of Masters: "What is thine hope this morn
That thou dightest thee, O Sigurd, to ride this world forlorn?"

"What needeth hope," said Sigurd, "when the heart of the Volsungs turns
To the light of the Glittering Heath, and the house where the Waster burns?
I shall slay the Foe of the Gods, as thou badst me a while ago,
And then with the Gold and its wisdom shalt thou be left alone."

"O Child," said the King of the Dwarf-kind, "when the day at last comes round
For the dread and the Dusk of the Gods, and the kin of the Wolf is unbound,
When thy sword shall hew the fire, and the wildfire beateth thy shield,
Shalt thou praise the wages of hope and the Gods that pitched the field?"

"O Foe of the Gods," said Sigurd, "wouldst thou hide the evil thing,
And the curse that is greater than thou, lest death end thy labouring,
Lest the night should come upon thee amidst thy toil for nought?
It is me, it is me that thou fearest, if indeed I know thy thought;
Yea me, who would utterly light the face of all good and ill,
If not with the fruitful beams that the summer shall fulfill,
Then at least with the world a-blazing, and the glare of the grinded sword."

And he sprang aloft to the saddle as he spake the latest word,
And the Wrath sang loud in the sheath as it ne'er had sung before,
And the cloudy flecks were scattered like flames on the heaven's floor,
And all was kindled at once, and that trench of the mountains grey
Was filled with the living light as the low sun lit the way:
But Regin turned from the glory with blinded eyes and dazed,
And lo, on the cloudy war-steed how another light there blazed,
And a great voice came from amidst it:

"O Regin, in good sooth,
I have hearkened not nor heeded the words of thy fear and thy ruth:
Thou hast told thy tale and thy longing, and thereto I hearkened well:—
Let it lead thee up to heaven, let it lead thee down to hell,
The deed shall be done tomorrow: thou shalt have that measureless Gold,
And devour the garnered wisdom that blessed thy realm of old,
That hath lain unspent and begrudged in the very heart of hate:
With the blood and the might of thy brother thine hunger shalt thou sate;
And this deed shall be mine and thine; but take heed for what followeth then!
Let each do after his kind! I shall do the deeds of men;
I shall harvest the field of their sowing, in the bed of their strewing shall sleep;
To them shall I give my life-days, to the Gods my glory to keep.
But thou with the wealth and the wisdom that the best of the Gods might praise,
If thou shalt indeed excel them and become the hope of the days,
Then me in turn hast thou conquered, and I shall be in turn
Thy fashioned brand of the battle through good and evil to burn,
Or the flame that sleeps in thy stithy for the gathered winds to blow,
When thou listest to do and undo and thine uttermost cunning to show.
But indeed I wot full surely that thou shalt follow thy kind;
And for all that cometh after, the Norns shall loose and bind."

Then his bridle-reins rang sweetly, and the warding-walls of death,
And Regin drew up to him, and the Wrath sang loud in the sheath,
And forth from that trench in the mountains by the westward way they ride;
And little and black goes Regin by the golden Volsung's side;
But no more his head is drooping, for he seeth the Elf-king's Gold;
The garnered might and the wisdom e'en now his eyes behold.

So up and up they journeyed, and ever as they went
 About the cold-slaked forges, o'er many a cloud-swept bent,
 Betwixt the walls of blackness, by shores of the fishless meres,
 And the fathomless desert waters, did Regin cast his fears,
 And wrap him in desire; and all alone he seemed
 As a God to his heirship wending, and forgotten and undreamed
 Was all the tale of Sigurd, and the folk he had toiled among,
 And the Volsungs, Odin's children, and the men-folk fair and young.
 So on they ride to the westward; and huge were the mountains grown
 And the floor of heaven was mingled with that tossing world of stone:
 And they rode till the noon was forgotten and the sun was waxen low,
 And they tarried not, though he perished, and the world grew dark below.
 Then they rode a mighty desert, a glimmering place and wide,
 And into a narrow pass high-walled on either side
 By the blackness of the mountains, and barred aback and in face
 By the empty night of the shadow; a windless silent place:
 But the white moon shone o'erhead mid the small sharp stars and pale,
 And each as a man alone they rode on the highway of bale.
 So ever they wended upward, and the midnight hour was o'er,
 And the stars grew pale and paler, and failed from the heaven's floor,
 And the moon was a long while dead, but where was the promise of day?
 No change came over the darkness, no streak of the dawning grey;
 No sound of the wind's uprising adown the night there ran:
 It was blind as the Gaping Gulf ere the first of the worlds began.
 Then athwart and athwart rode Sigurd and sought the walls of the pass,
 But found no wall before him; and the road rang hard as brass
 Beneath the hoofs of Greyfell, as up and up he trod:
 —Was it the daylight of Hell, or the night of the doorway of God?
 But lo, at the last a glimmer, and a light from the west there came,
 And another and another, like points of far-off flame;
 And they grew and brightened and gathered; and whiles together they ran
 Like the moon wake over the waters; and whiles they were scant and wan,
 Some greater and some lesser, like the boats of fishers laid
 About the sea of midnight; and a dusky dawn they made,
 A faint and glimmering twilight: So Sigurd strains his eyes,
 And he sees how a land deserted all round about him lies
 More changeless than mid-ocean, as fruitless as its floor:
 Then the heart leaps up within him, for he knows that his journey is o'er.
 And there he draweth bridle on the first of the Glittering Heath:
 And the Wrath is waxen merry and sings in the golden sheath
 As he leaps adown from Greyfell, and stands upon his feet,
 And wends his ways through the twilight the Foe of the Gods to meet.

Sigurd slayeth Fafnir the Serpent.

Nought Sigurd seeth of Regin, and nought he heeds of him,
 As in watchful might and glory he strides the desert dim,
 And behind him paceth Greyfell; but he deems the time o'erlong
 Till he meet the great gold-warden, the over-lord of wrong.
 So he wendeth midst the silence through the measureless desert place,
 And beholds the countless glitter with wise and steadfast face,
 Till him-seems in a little season that the flames grown somewhat wan,
 And a grey thing glimmers before him, and becomes a mighty man.

One-eyed and ancient-seeming, in cloud-grey raiment clad;
A friendly man and glorious, and of visage smiling-glad:
Then content in Sigurd groweth because of his majesty,
And he heareth him speak in the desert as the wind of the winter sea:
"Hail Sigurd! Give me thy greeting ere thy ways alone thou wend!"
Said Sigurd: "Hail! I greet thee, my friend and my fathers' friend."
"Now whither away," said the elder, "with the Steed and the ancient Sword?"
"To the greedy house," said Sigurd, "and the King of the Heavy Hoard."
"Wilt thou smite, O Sigurd, Sigurd?" said the ancient mighty-one.
"Yea, yea, I shall smite," said the Volsung, "save the Gods have slain the sun."
"What wise wilt thou smite," said the elder? "lest the dark devour thy day?"
"Thou hast praised the sword," said the child, "and the sword shall find a way."
"Be learned of me," said the Wise-one, "for I was the first of thy folk."
Said the child: "I shall do thy bidding, and for thee shall I strike the stroke."
Spake the Wise-one: "Thus shalt thou do when thou wendest hence alone:
Thou shalt find a path in the desert, and a road in the world of stone;
It is smooth and deep and hollow, but the rain hath riven it not,
And the wild wind hath not worn it, for it is but Fafnir's slot,
Whereby he wends to the water and the fathomless pool of old,
When his heart in the dawn is weary, and he loathes the ancient Gold:
There think of the great and the fathers, and bare the whetted Wrath,
And dig a pit in the highway, and a grave in the Serpent's path:
Lie thou therein, O Sigurd, and thine hope from the glooming hide,
And be as the dead for a season, and the living light abide!
And so shall thine heart avail thee, and thy mighty fateful hand,
And the Light that lay in the Branstock, the well-belovèd brand."
Said the child: "I shall do thy bidding, and for thee shall I strike the stroke;
For I love thee, friend of my fathers, Wise Heart of the holy folk."
So spake the Son of Sigmund, and beheld no man anear,
And again was the night the midnight, and the twinkling flames shone clear
In the hush of the Glittering Heath; and alone went Sigmund's son
Till he came to the road of Fafnir, and the highway worn by one,
By the drift of the rain unfurrowed, by the windy years unrent,
And forth from the dark it came, and into the dark it went.
Great then was the heart of Sigurd, for there in the midmost he stayed,
And thought of the ancient fathers, and bared the bright blue blade,
That shone as a fleck of the day-light, and the night was all around.
Fair then was the Son of Sigmund as he tolled and laboured the ground;
Great, mighty he was in his working, and the Glittering Heath he clave,
And the sword shone blue before him as he dug the pit and the grave:
There he hid his hope from the night-tide and lay like one of the dead,
And wise and wary he bided; and the heavens hung over his head.
Now the night wanes over Sigurd, and the ruddy rings he sees,
And his war-gear's fair adornment, and the God-folk's images;
But a voice in the desert ariseth, a sound in the waste has birth,
A changing tinkle and clatter, as of gold dragged over the earth:
O'er Sigurd widens the day-light, and the sound is drawing close,
And speedier than the trample of speedy feet it goes;
But ever deemeth Sigurd that the sun brings back the day,
For the grave grows lighter and lighter and heaven o'erhead is grey.

But now, how the rattling waxeth till he may not heed nor hark!
And the day and the heavens are hidden, and o'er Sigurd rolls the dark,
As the flood of a pitchy river, and heavy-thick is the air
With the venom of hate long hoarded, and lies once fashioned fair:
Then a wan face comes from the darkness, and is wrought in manlike wise,
And the lips are writhed with laughter and bleared are the blinded eyes;
And it wandereth hither and thither, and searcheth through the grave
And departeth, leaving nothing, save the dark, rolled wave on wave
O'er the golden head of Sigurd and the edges of the sword,
And the world weighs heavy on Sigurd, and the weary curse of the Hoard:
Him-seemed the grave grew straiter, and his hope of life grew chill,
And his heart by the Worm was enfolded, and the bonds of the Ancient Ill.
Then was Sigurd stirred by his glory, and he strove with the swaddling of Death;
He turned in the pit on the highway, and the grave of the Glittering Heath;
He laughed and smote with the laughter and thrust up over his head.
And smote the venom asunder, and clave the heart of Dread;
Then he leapt from the pit and the grave, and the rushing river of blood,
And fulfilled with the joy of the War-God on the face of earth he stood
With red sword high uplifted, with wrathful glittering eyes;
And he laughed at the heavens above him for he saw the sun arise,
And Sigurd gleamed on the desert, and shone in the new-born light,
And the wind in his raiment wavered, and all the world was bright.

But there was the ancient Fafnir, and the Face of Terror lay
On the huddled folds of the Serpent, that were black and ashen-grey
In the desert lit by the sun; and those twain looked each on each,
And forth from the Face of Terror went a sound of dreadful speech:

"Child, child, who art thou that hast smitten? bright child, of whence is thy birth?"

"I am called the Wild-thing Glorious, and alone I wend on the earth."

"Fierce child, and who was thy father?—Thou hast cleft the heart of the Foe!"

"Am I like to the sons of men-folk, that my father I should know?"

"Wert thou born of a nameless wonder? shall the lies to my death-day cling?"

"How lieth Sigurd the Volsung, and the Son of Sigmund the King?"

"O bitter father of Sigurd!—thou hast cleft mine heart atwain!"

"I arose, and I wondered and wended, and I smote, and I smote not in vain."

"What master hath taught thee of murder?—Thou hast wasted Fafnir's day."

"I, Sigurd, knew and desired, and the bright sword learned the way."

"Thee, thee shall the rattling Gold and the red rings bring to the bane."

"Yet mine hand shall cast them abroad, and the earth shall gather again."

"I see thee great in thine anger, and the Norns thou heedest not."

"O Fafnir, speak of the Norns and the wisdom forgot!"

"Let the death-doomed flee from the ocean, him the wind and the weather shall drown."

"O Fafnir, tell of the Norns ere thy life thou layest adown!"

"O manifold is their kindred, and who shall tell them all?

There are they that rule o'er men-folk and the stars that rise and fall:

—I knew of the folk of the Dwarfs, and I knew their Norns of old;

And I fought, and I fell in the morning, and I die afar from the gold:

—I have seen the Gods of heaven, and their Norns withal I know:

They love and withhold their helping, they hate and refrain the blow;

They curse and they may not sunder, they bless and they shall not bend;

They have fashioned the good and the evil; they abide the change and the end."

"O Fafnir, what of the Isle, and what hast thou known of its name,
Where the Gods shall mingle edges with Surt and the Sons of the Flame?"

"O child, O Strong Compeller! Unshapen is it hight;
There the fallow blades shall be shaken and the Dark and the Day shall smite,
When the Bridge of the Gods is broken, and their white steeds swim the sea,
And the uttermost field is stricken, last strife of thee and me."

"What then shall endure, O Fafnir, the tale of the battle to tell?"

"I am blind, O Strong Compeller, in the bonds of Death and Hell.
But thee shall the rattling Gold and the red rings bring unto bane."

"Yet the rings mine hand shall scatter, and the earth shall gather again."

"Woe, woe! in the days passed over I bore the Helm of Dread,
I reared the Face of Terror, and the hoarded hate of the Dead:
I overcame and was mighty; I was wise and cherished my heart
In the waste where no man wandered, and the high house builded apart:
Till I met thine hand, O Sigurd, and thy might ordained from of old;
And I fought and fell in the morning, and I die far off from the Gold."

Then Sigurd leaned on his sword, and a dreadful voice went by
Like the wail of a God departing and the War-God's misery;
And strong words of ancient wisdom went by on the desert wind,
The words that mar and fashion, the words that loose and bind;
And sounds of a strange lamenting, and such strange things bewailed,
That words to tell their meaning the tongue of man hath failed.

Then all sank into silence, and the Son of Sigmund stood
On the torn and furrowed desert by the pool of Fafnir's blood,
And the Serpent lay before him, dead, chilly, dull, and grey;
And over the Glittering Heath fair shone the sun and the day,
And a light wind followed the sun and breathed o'er the fateful place,
As fresh as it furrows the sea-plain or bows the acres' face.

Sigurd slayeth Regin the Master of Masters on the Glittering Heath.

There standeth Sigurd the Volsung, and leaneth on his sword,
And beside him now is Greyfell and looks on his golden lord,
And the world is awake and living; and whither now shall they wend,
Who have come to the Glittering Heath, and wrought that deed to its end?
For hither comes Regin the Master from the skirts of the field of death,
And he shadeth his eyes from the sunlight as afoot he goeth and saith:
"Ah, let me live for a while! for a while and all shall be well,
When passed is the house of murder and I creep from the prison of hell."

Afoot he went o'er the desert, and he came unto Sigurd and stared
At the golden gear of the man, and the Wrath yet bloody and bared,
And the light locks raised by the wind, and the eyes beginning to smile,
And the lovely lips of the Volsung, and the brow that knew no guile;
And he murmured under his breath while his eyes grew white with wrath:

"O who art thou, and wherefore, and why art thou in the path?"

Then he turned to the ash-grey Serpent, and grovelled low on the ground,
And he drank of that pool of the blood where the stones of the wild were drowned,
And long he lapped as a dog; but when he arose again,
Lo, a flock of the mountain-eagles that drew to the feastful plain;
And he turned and looked on Sigurd, as bright in the sun he stood,
A stripling fair and slender, and wiped the Wrath of the blood.

But Regin cried: "O Dwarf-kind, O many-shifting folk,
O shapes of might and wonder, am I too freed from the yoke,
That binds my soul to my body a withered thing forlorn,
While the short-lived fools of man-folk so fair and oft are born?
Now swift in the air shall I be, and young in the concourse of kings,
If my heart shall come to desire the gain of earthly things."

And he looked and saw how Sigurd was sheathing the Flame of War,
And the eagles screamed in the wind, but their voice came faint from afar:
Then he scowled, and crouched and darkened, and came to Sigurd and spake:
"O child, thou hast slain my brother, and the Wrath is alive and awake."

"Thou sayest sooth," said Sigurd, "thy deed and mine is done:
But now our ways shall sunder, for here, meseemeth, the sun
Hath but little of deeds to do, and no love to win aback."

Then Regin crouched before him, and he spake: "Fare on to the wrack!
Fare on to the murder of men, and the deeds of thy kindred of old!
And surely of thee as of them shall the tale be speedily told.
Thou hast slain thy Master's brother, and what wouldst thou say thereto,
Were the judges met for the judging and the doom-ring hallowed due?"

Then Sigurd spake as aforetime: "Thy deed and mine it was,
And now our ways shall sunder, and into the world will I pass."

But Regin darkened before him, and exceeding grim was he grown,
And he spake: "Thou hast slain my brother, and wherewith wilt thou atone?"

"Stand up, O Master," said Sigurd, "O Singer of ancient days,
And take the wealth I have won thee, ere we wend on the sundering ways.
I have toiled and thou hast desired, and the Treasure is surely anear,
And thou hast wisdom to find it, and I have slain thy fear."

But Regin crouched and darkened: "Thou hast slain my brother," he said.

"Take thou the Gold," quoth Sigurd, "for the ransom of my head!"

Then Regin crouched and darkened, and over the earth he hung;
And he said: "Thou hast slain my brother, and the Gods are yet but young."

Bright Sigurd towered above him, and the Wrath cried out in the sheath,
And Regin writhed against it as the adder turns on death;
And he spake: "Thou hast slain my brother, and today shalt thou be my thrall:
Yea a King shall be my cook-boy and this heath my cooking-hall."

Then he crept to the ash-grey coils where the life of his brother had lain.
And he drew a glaive from his side and smote the smitten and slain,
And tore the heart from Fafnir, while the eagles cried o'erhead.
And sharp and shrill was their voice o'er the entrails of the dead.

Then Regin spake to Sigurd: "Of this slaying wilt thou be free?
Then gather thou fire together and roast the heart for me,
That I may eat it and live, and be thy master and more;
For therein was might and wisdom, and the grudged and hoarded lore:—
—Or else, depart on thy ways afraid from the Glittering Heath."

Then he fell abackward and slept, nor set his sword in the sheath,
But his hand was red on the hilts and blue were the edges bared,
Ash-grey was his visage waxen, and with open eyes he stared
On the height of heaven above him, and a fearful thing he seemed,
As his soul went wide in the world, and of rule and kingship he dreamed.

But Sigurd took the Heart, and wood on the waste he found,
The wood that grew and died, as it crept on the niggard ground,
And grew and died again, and lay like whitened bones;

And the ernes cried over his head, as he builded his hearth of stones,
 And kindled the fire for cooking, and sat and sang o'er the roast
 The song of his fathers of old, and the Wolfings' gathering host:
 So there on the Glittering Heath rose up the little flame,
 And the dry sticks crackled amidst it, and alow the eagles came,
 And seven they were by tale, and they pitched all round about
 The cooking-fire of Sigurd, and sent their song-speech out:
 But nought he knoweth its wisdom, or the word that they would speak:
 And hot grew the Heart of Fafnir and sang amid the reek.

Then Sigurd looketh on Regin, and he deemeth it overlong
 That he dighteth the dear-bought morsel, and the might for the Master of wrong,
 So he reacheth his hand to the roast to see if the cooking be o'er;
 But the blood and the fat seethed from it and scalded his finger sore,
 And he set his hand to his mouth to quench the fleshly smart,
 And he tasted the flesh of the Serpent and the blood of Fafnir's Heart:
 Then there came a change upon him, for the speech of fowl he knew,
 And wise in the ways of the beast-kind as the Dwarfs of old he grew;
 And he knitted his brows and hearkened, and wrath in his heart arose;
 For he felt beset of evil in a world of many foes.
 But the hilts of the Wrath he handled, and Regin's heart he saw,
 And how that the Foe of the Gods the net of death would draw;
 And his bright eyes flashed and sparkled, and his mouth grew set and stern
 As he hearkened the voice of the eagles, and their song began to learn.

For the first cried out in the desert: "O mighty Sigmund's son,
 How long wilt thou sit and tarry now the dear-bought roast is done?"

And the second: "Volsung, arise! for the horns blow up to the hall,
 And dight are the purple hangings, and the King to the feasting should fall."

And the third: "How great is the feast if the eater eat aright
 The Heart of the wisdom of old and the after-world's delight!"

And the fourth: "Yea, what of Regin? shall he scatter wrack o'er the world?
 Shall the father be slain by the son, and the brother 'gainst brother be hurled?"

And the fifth: "He hath taught a stripling the gifts of a God to give:
 He hath reared up a King for the slaying, that he alone might live."

And the sixth: "He shall waken mighty as a God that scorneth at truth;
 He hath drunk of the blood of the Serpent, and drowned all hope and ruth."

And the seventh: "Arise, O Sigurd, lest the hour be overlate!
 For the sun in the mid-noon shineth, and swift is the hand of Fate:
 Arise! lest the world run backward and the blind heart have its will,
 And once again be tangled the sundered good and ill;
 Lest love and hatred perish, lest the world forget its tale,
 And the Gods sit deedless, dreaming, in the high-walled heavenly vale."

Then swift ariseth Sigurd, and the Wrath in his hand is bare,
 And he looketh, and Regin sleepeth, and his eyes wide-open glare;
 But his lips smile false in his dreaming, and his hand is on the sword;
 For he dreams himself the Master and the new world's fashioning-lord.
 And his dream hath forgotten Sigurd, and the King's life lies in the pit;
 He is nought; Death gnaweth upon him, while the Dwarfs in mastery sit.

But lo, how the eyes of Sigurd the heart of the guileful behold,
 And great is Allfather Odin, and upriseth the Curse of the Gold,
 And the Branstock bloometh to heaven from the ancient wondrous root;
 The summer hath shone on its blossoms, and Sigurd's Wrath is the fruit:
 Dread then he cried in the desert: "Guile-master, lo thy deed!

Hast thou nurst my life for destruction, and my death to serve thy need?
Hast thou kept me here for the net and the death that tame things die?
Hast thou feared me overmuch, thou Foe of the Gods on high?
Lest the sword thine hand was wielding should turn about and cleave
The tangled web of nothing thou hadst wearied thyself to weave.
Lo here the sword and the stroke! judge the Norns betwixt us twain!
But for me, I will live and die not, nor shall all my hope be vain.“
Then his second stroke struck Sigurd, for the Wrath flashed thin and white,
And 'twixt head and trunk of Regin fierce ran the fateful light;
And there lay brother by brother a faded thing and wan.
But Sigurd cried in the desert: "So far have I wended on!
Dead are the foes of God-home that would blend the good and the ill;
And the World shall yet be famous, and the Gods shall have their will.
Nor shall I be dead and forgotten, while the earth grows worse and worse?
With the blind heart king o'er the people, and binding curse with curse.“

How Sigurd took to him the Treasure of the Elf Andvari.

Now Sigurd eats of the heart that once in the Dwarf-king lay,
The hoard of the wisdom begrudged, the might of the earlier day.
Then wise of heart was he waxen, but longing in him grew
To sow the seed he had gotten, and till the field he knew.
So he leapeth aback of Greyfell, and rideth the desert bare.
And the hollow slot of Fafnir, that led to the Serpent's lair.
Then long he rode adown it, and the ernes flew overhead,
And tidings great and glorious, of that Treasure of old they said.
So far o'er the waste he wended, and when the night was come
He saw the earth-old dwelling, the dread Gold-wallower's home:
On the skirts of the Heath it was builded by a tumbled stony bent;
High went that house to the heavens, down 'neath the earth it went.
Of unwrought iron fashioned for the heart of a greedy king:
'Twas a mountain, blind without, and within was its plenishing
But the Hoard of Andvari the ancient, and the sleeping Curse unseen,
The Gold of the Gods that spared not and the greedy that have been.
Through the door strode Sigurd the Volsung, and the grey moon and the sword
Fell in on the tawny gold-heaps of the ancient hapless Hoard:
Gold gear of hosts unburied, and the coin of cities dead,
Great spoil of the ages of battle, lay there on the Serpent's bed:
Huge blocks from mid-earth quarried, where none but the Dwarfs have mined,
Wide sands of the golden rivers no foot of man may find
Lay 'neath the spoils of the mighty and the ruddy rings of yore:
But amidst was the Helm of Aweing that the Fear of earth-folk bore,
And there gleamed a wonder beside it, the Hauberk all of gold,
Whose like is not in the heavens nor has earth of its fellow told:
There Sigurd seeth moreover Andvari's Ring of Gain,
The hope of Loki's finger, the Ransom's utmost grain;
For it shone on the midmost gold-heap like the first star set in the sky
In the yellow space of even when moon-rise draweth anigh.
Then laughed the Son of Sigmund, and stooped to the golden land,
And gathered that first of the harvest and set it on his hand;
And he did on the Helm of Aweing, and the Hauberk all of gold,
Whose like is not in the heavens nor has earth of its fellow told:
Then he praised the day of the Volsungs amid the yellow light,
And he set his hand to the labour and put forth his kingly might;

He dragged forth gold to the moon, on the desert's face he laid
 The innermost earth's adornment, and rings for the nameless made;
 He toiled and loaded Greyfell, and the cloudy war-steed shone
 And the gear of Sigurd rattled in the flood of moonlight wan;
 There he toiled and loaded Greyfell, and the Volsung's armour rang
 Mid the yellow bed of the Serpent: but without the eagles sang:
 "Bind the red rings, O Sigurd! let the gold shine free and clear!
 For what hath the Son of the Volsungs the ancient Curse to fear?"
 "Bind the red rings, O Sigurd! for thy tale is well begun,
 And the world shall be good and gladdened by the Gold lit up by the sun."
 "Bind the red rings, O Sigurd! and gladden all thine heart!
 For the world shall make thee merry ere thou and she depart."
 "Bind the red rings, O Sigurd! for the ways go green below,
 Go green to the dwelling of Kings, and the halls that the Queen-folk know."
 "Bind the red rings, O Sigurd! for what is there bides by the way,
 Save the joy of folk to awaken, and the dawn of the merry day?"
 "Bind the red rings, O Sigurd! for the strife awaits thine hand,
 And a plenteous war-field's reaping, and the praise of many a land."
 "Bind the red rings, O Sigurd! But how shall storehouse hold
 That glory of thy winning and the tidings to be told?"

Now the moon was dead, and the star-worlds were great on the heavenly plain,
 When the steed was fully laden; then Sigurd taketh the rein
 And turns to the ruined rock-wall that the lair was built beneath,
 For there he deemed was the gate and the door of the Glittering Heath,
 But not a whit moved Greyfell for aught that the King might do;
 Then Sigurd pondered a while, till the heart of the beast he knew,
 And clad in all his war-gear he leaped to the saddle-stead,
 And with pride and mirth neighed Greyfell and tossed aloft his head,
 And sprang uns spurred o'er the waste, and light and swift he went,
 And breasted the broken rampart, the stony tumbled bent;
 And over the brow he clomb, and there beyond was the world,
 A place of many mountains and great crags together hurled.
 So down to the west he wendeth, and goeth swift and light,
 And the stars are beginning to wane, and the day is mingled with night;
 For full fain was the sun to arise and look on the Gold set free,
 And the Dwarf-wrought rings of the Treasure and the gifts from the floor of the sea.

How Sigurd awoke Brynhild upon Hindfell.

By long roads rideth Sigurd amidst that world of stone,
 And somewhat south he turneth; for he would not be alone,
 But longs for the dwellings of man-folk, and the kingly people's speech,
 And the days of the glee and the joyance, where men laugh each to each.
 But still the desert endureth, and afar must Greyfell fare
 From the wrack of the Glittering Heath, and Fafnir's golden lair.
 Long Sigurd rideth the waste, when, lo, on a morning of day
 From out of the tangled crag-walls, amidst the cloud-land grey
 Comes up a mighty mountain, and it is as though there burns
 A torch amidst of its cloud-wreath; so thither Sigurd turns,
 For he deems indeed from its topmost to look on the best of the earth;
 And Greyfell neigheth beneath him, and his heart is full of mirth.
 So he rideth higher and higher, and the light grows great and strange,
 And forth from the clouds it flickers, till at noon they gather and change,

And settle thick on the mountain, and hide its head from sight;
But the winds in a while are awakened, and day bettereth ere the night,
And, lifted a measureless mass o'er the desert crag-walls high,
Cloudless the mountain riseth against the sunset sky,
The sea of the sun grown golden, as it ebbs from the day's desire;
And the light that afar was a torch is grown a river of fire,
And the mountain is black above it, and below is it dark and dun;
And there is the head of Hindfell as an island in the sun.

Night falls, but yet rides Sigurd, and hath no thought of rest,
For he longs to climb that rock-world and behold the earth at its best;
But now mid the maze of the foot-hills he seeth the light no more,
And the stars are lovely and gleaming on the lightless heavenly floor.
So up and up he wendeth till the night is wearing thin;
And he rideth a rift of the mountain, and all is dark therein,
Till the stars are dimmed by dawning and the wakening world is cold;
Then afar in the upper rock-wall a breach doth he behold,
And a flood of light poured inward the doubtful dawning blinds:
So swift he rideth thither and the mouth of the breach he finds,
And sitteth awhile on Greyfell on the marvellous thing to gaze:
For lo, the side of Hindfell enwrapped by the fervent blaze,
And nought 'twixt earth and heaven save a world of flickering flame,
And a hurrying shifting tangle, where the dark rents went and came.

Great groweth the heart of Sigurd with uttermost desire,
And he crieth kind to Greyfell, and they hasten up, and nigher,
Till he draweth rein in the dawning on the face of Hindfell's steep:
But who shall heed the dawning where the tongues of that wildfire leap?
For they weave a wavering wall, that driveth over the heaven
The wind that is born within it; nor ever aside is it driven
By the mightiest wind of the waste, and the rain-flood amidst it is nought;
And no wayfarer's door and no window the hand of its builder hath wrought
But thereon is the Volsung smiling as its breath uplifteth his hair,
And his eyes shine bright with its image, and his mail gleams white and fair,
And his war-helm pictures the heavens and the waning stars behind:
But his neck is Greyfell stretching to snuff at the flame-wall blind.
And his cloudy flank upheaveth, and tinkleth the knitted mail,
And the gold of the uttermost waters is waxen wan and pale.

Now Sigurd turns in his saddle, and the hilt of the Wrath he shifts,
And draws a girth the tighter; then the gathered reins he lifts,
And crieth aloud to Greyfell, and rides at the wildfire's heart;
But the white wall wavers before him and the flame-flood rusheth apart,
And high o'er his head it riseth, and wide and wild is its roar
As it beareth the mighty tidings to the very heavenly floor:
But he rideth through its roaring as the warrior rides the rye,
When it bows with the wind of the summer and the hid spears draw anigh
The white flame licks his raiment and sweeps through Greyfell's mane,
And bathes both hands of Sigurd and the hilts of Fafnir's bane,
And winds about his war-helm and mingles with his hair,
But nought his raiment dusketh or dims his glittering gear;
Then it fails and fades and darkens till all seems left behind,
And dawn and the blaze is swallowed in mid-mirk stark and blind.

But forth a little further and a little further on
And all is calm about him, and he sees the scorched earth wan
Beneath a glimmering twilight, and he turns his conquering eyes,
And a ring of pale slaked ashes on the side of Hindfell lies;

And the world of the waste is beyond it; and all is hushed and grey.
And the new-risen moon is a-paleing, and the stars grow faint with day.
Then Sigurd looked before him and a Shield-burg there he saw,
A wall of the tiles of Odin wrought clear without a flaw,
The gold by the silver gleaming, and the ruddy by the white;
And the blazonings of their glory were done upon them bright,
As of dear things wrought for the war-lords new come to Odin's hall.
Piled high aloft to the heavens uprose that battle-wall,
And far o'er the topmost shield-rim for a banner of fame there hung
A glorious golden buckler; and against the staff it rang
As the earliest wind of dawning uprose on Hindfell's face
And the light from the yellowing east beamed soft on the shielded place.
But the Wrath cried out in answer as Sigurd leapt adown
To the wasted soil of the desert by that rampart of renown;
He looked but little beneath it, and the dwelling of God it seemed,
As against its gleaming silence the eager Sigurd gleamed:
He draweth not sword from scabbard, as the wall he wendeth around,
And it is but the wind and Sigurd that wakeneth any sound:
But, lo, to the gate he cometh, and the doors are open wide,
And no warder the way withstandeth, and no earls by the threshold abide
So he stands awhile and marvels; then the baleful light of the Wrath
Gleams bare in his ready hand as he wendeth the inward path:
For he doubteth some guile of the Gods, or perchance some Dwarf-king's snare,
Or a mock of the Giant people that shall fade in the morning air:
But he getteth him in and gazeth; and a wall doth he behold,
And the ruddy set by the white, and the silver by the gold;
But within the garth that it girdeth no work of man is set,
But the utmost head of Hindfell ariseth higher yet;
And below in the very midmost is a Giant-fashioned mound,
Piled high as the rims of the Shield-burg above the level ground;
And there, on that mound of the Giants, o'er the wilderness forlorn,
A pale grey image lieth, and gleameth in the morn.
So there was Sigurd alone; and he went from the shielded door.
And aloft in the desert of wonder the Light of the Branstock he bore;
And he set his face to the earth-mound, and beheld the image wan,
And the dawn was growing about it; and, lo, the shape of a man
Set forth to the eyeless desert on the tower-top of the world,
High over the cloud-wrought castle whence the windy bolts are hurled.
Now he comes to the mound and climbs it, and will see if the man be dead
Some King of the days forgotten laid there with crownèd head,
Or the frame of a God, it may be, that in heaven hath changed his life,
Or some glorious heart beloved, God-rapt from the earthly strife:
Now over the body he standeth, and seeth it shapen fair,
And clad from head to foot-sole in pale grey-glittering gear,
In a hauberk wrought as straitly as though to the flesh it were grown:
But a great helm hideth the head and is girt with a glittering crown.
So thereby he stoopeth and kneeleth, for he deems it were good indeed
If the breath of life abide there and the speech to help at need;
And as sweet as the summer wind from a garden under the sun
Cometh forth on the topmost Hindfell the breath of that sleeping-one.
Then he saith he will look on the face, if it bear him love or hate,
Or the bonds for his life's constraining, or the sundering doom of fate.
So he draweth the helm from the head, and, lo, the brow snow-white,
And the smooth unfurrowed cheeks, and the wise lips breathing light;

And the face of a woman it is, and the fairest that ever was born,
Shown forth to the empty heavens and the desert world forlorn:
But he looketh, and loveth her sore, and he longeth her spirit to move,
And awaken her heart to the world, that she may behold him and love.
And he toucheth her breast and her hands, and he loveth her passing sore;
And he saith; "Awake! I am Sigurd," but she moveth never the more.

Then he looked on his bare bright blade, and he said: "Thou—what wilt thou do?
For indeed as I came by the war-garth thy voice of desire I knew."
Bright burnt the pale blue edges for the sunrise drew anear,
And the rims of the Shield-burg glittered, and the east was exceeding clear:
So the eager edges he setteth to the Dwarf-wrought battle-coat
Where the hammered ring-knit collar constraineth the woman's throat;
But the sharp Wrath biteth and rendeth, and before it fail the rings.
And, lo, the gleam of the linen, and the light of golden things:
Then he driveth the blue steel onward, and through the skirt, and out.
Till nought but the rippling linen is wrapping her about;
Then he deems her breath comes quicker and her breast begins to heave,
So he turns about the War-Flame and rends down either sleeve,
Till her arms lie white in her raiment, and a river of sun-bright hair
Flows free o'er bosom and shoulder and floods the desert bare.

Then a flush cometh over her visage and a sigh up-heaveth her breast,
And her eyelids quiver and open, and she wakeneth into rest;
Wide-eyed on the dawning she gazeth, too glad to change or smile,
And but little moveth her body, nor speaketh she yet for a while;
And yet kneels Sigurd moveless her wakening speech to heed,
While soft the waves of the daylight o'er the starless heavens speed,
And the gleaming rims of the Shield-burg yet bright and brighter grow,
And the thin moon hangeth her horns dead-white in the golden glow.

Then she turned and gazed on Sigurd, and her eyes met the Volsung's eyes.
And mighty and measureless now did the tide of his love arise,
For their longing had met and mingled, and he knew of her heart that she loved,
As she spake unto nothing but him and her lips with the speech-flood moved:

"O, what is the thing so mighty that my weary sleep hath torn,
And rent the fallow bondage, and the wan woe over-worn?"

He said: "The hand of Sigurd and the Sword of Sigmund's son,
And the heart that the Volsungs fashioned this deed for thee have done."

But she said: "Where then is Odin that laid me here alow?
Long lasteth the grief of the world, and manfolk's tangled woe!"

"He dwelleth above," said Sigurd, "but I on the earth abide,
And I came from the Glittering Heath the waves of thy fire to ride."

But therewith the sun rose upward and lightened all the earth,
And the light flashed up to the heavens from the rims of the glorious girth;
But they twain arose together, and with both her palms outspread,
And bathed in the light returning, she cried aloud and said:

"All hail, O Day and thy Sons, and thy kin of the coloured things!
Hail, following Night, and thy Daughter that leadeth thy wavering wings!
Look down with unangry eyes on us today alive,
And give us the hearts victorious, and the gain for which we strive!
All hail, ye Lords of God-home, and ye Queens of the House of Gold!
Hail, thou dear Earth that bearest, and thou Wealth of field and fold!
Give us, your noble children, the glory of wisdom and speech,
And the hearts and the hands of healing, and the mouths and hands that teach!"

Then they turned and were knit together; and oft and o'er again
 They craved, and kissed rejoicing, and their hearts were full and fain.
 Then Sigurd looketh upon her, and the words from his heart arise:
 "Thou art the fairest of earth, and the wisest of the wise;
 O who art thou that lovest? I am Sigurd, e'en as I told;
 I have slain the Foe of the Gods, and gotten the Ancient Gold;
 And great were the gain of thy love, and the gift of mine earthly days,
 If we twain should never sunder as we wend on the changing ways.
 O who art thou that lovest, thou fairest of all things born?
 And what meaneth thy sleep and thy slumber in the wilderness forlorn?"
 She said: "I am she that loveth: I was born of the earthly folk,
 But of old Allfather took me from the Kings and their wedding yoke:
 And he called me the Victory-Wafer, and I went and came as he would,
 And I chose the slain for his war-host, and the days were glorious and good,
 Till the thoughts of my heart overcame me, and the pride of my wisdom and speech,
 And I scorned the earth-folk's Framer and the Lord of the world I must teach:
 For the death-doomed I caught from the sword, and the fated life I slew,
 And I deemed that my deeds were goodly, and that long I should do and undo.
 But Allfather came against me and the God in his wrath arose;
 And he cried: 'Thou hast thought in thy folly that the Gods have friends and foes,
 That they wake, and the world wends onward, that they sleep, and the world slips back,
 That they laugh, and the world's weal waxeth, that they frown and fashion the wrack:
 Thou hast cast up the curse against me; it shall fall aback on thine head;
 Go back to the sons of repentance, with the children of sorrow wed!
 For the Gods are great unholpen, and their grief is seldom seen,
 And the wrong that they will and must be is soon as it had not been.'
 "Yet I thought: 'Shall I wed in the world, shall I gather grief on the earth?
 Then the fearless heart shall I wed, and bring the best to birth,
 And fashion such tales for the telling, that Earth shall be holpen at least,
 If the Gods think scorn of its fairness, as they sit at the changeless feast.'
 "Then somewhat smiled Allfather; and he spake: 'So let it be!
 The doom thereof abideth; the doom of me and thee.
 Yet long shall the time pass over ere thy waking-day be born:
 Fare forth, and forget and be weary 'neath the Sting of the Sleepful Thorn.'
 "So I came to the head of Hindfell and the ruddy shields and white,
 And the wall of the wildfire wavering around the isle of night;
 And there the Sleep-thorn pierced me, and the slumber on me fell,
 And the night of nameless sorrows that hath no tale to tell.
 Now I am she that loveth; and the day is nigh at hand
 When I, who have ridden the sea-realm and the regions of the land,
 And dwelt in the measureless mountains and the forge of stormy days,
 Shall dwell in the house of my fathers and the land of the people's praise;
 And there shall hand meet hand, and heart by heart shall beat,
 And the lying-down shall be joyous, and the morn's uprising sweet.
 Lo now, I look on thine heart and behold of thine inmost will,
 That thou of the days wouldst hearken that our portion shall fulfill;
 But O, be wise of man-folk, and the hope of thine heart refrain!
 As oft in the battle's beginning ye vex the steed with the rein,
 Lest at last in its latter ending, when the sword hath hushed the horn,
 His limbs should be weary and fail, and his might be over-worn.
 O be wise, lest thy love constrain me, and my vision wax o'er-clear,
 And thou ask of the thing that thou shouldst not, and the thing that thou wouldst not hear.
 "Know thou, most mighty of men, that the Norns shall order all,
 And yet without thine helping shall no whit of their will befall;

Be wise! 'tis a marvel of words, and a mock for the fool and the blind,
But I saw it writ in the heavens, and its fashioning there did I find:
And the night of the Norns and their slumber, and the tide when the world runs back,
And the way of the sun is tangled, it is wrought of the dastard's lack.
But the day when the fair earth blossoms, and the sun is bright above.
Of the daring deeds is it fashioned and the eager hearts of love.

"Be wise, and cherish thine hope in the freshness of the days,
And scatter its seed from thine hand in the field of the people's praise;
Then fair shall it fall in the furrow, and some the earth shall speed,
And the sons of men shall marvel at the blossom of the deed:
But some the earth shall speed not: nay rather, the wind of the heaven
Shall waft it away from thy longing—and a gift to the Gods hast thou given,
And a tree for the roof and the wall in the house of the hope that shall be,
Though it seemeth our very sorrow, and the grief of thee and me.

"Strive not with the fools of man-folk: for belike thou shalt overcome;
And what then is the gain of thine hunting when thou bearest the quarry home?
Or else shall the fool overcome thee, and what deed thereof shall grow?
Nay, strive with the wise man rather, and increase thy woe and his woe;
Yet thereof a gain hast thou gotten; and the half of thine heart hast thou won
If thou may'st prevail against him, and his deeds are the deeds thou hast done:
Yea, and if thou fall before him, in him shalt thou live again,
And thy deeds in his hand shall blossom, and his heart of thine heart shall be fain.

"When thou hearest the fool rejoicing, and he saith, 'It is over and past,
And the wrong was better than right, and hate turns into love at the last,
And we strove for nothing at all, and the Gods are fallen asleep;
For so good is the world a growing that the evil good shall reap.'
Then loosen thy sword in the scabbard and settle the helm on thine head,
For men betrayed are mighty, and great are the wrongfully dead

"Wilt thou do the deed and repent it? thou hadst better never been born:
Wilt thou do the deed and exalt it? then thy fame shall be outworn:
Thou shalt do the deed and abide it, and sit on thy throne on high,
And look on today and tomorrow as those that never die.

"Love thou the Gods—and withstand them, lest thy fame should fail in the end,
And thou be but their thrall and their bondsmen, who wert born for their very friend:
For few things from the Gods are hidden, and the hearts of men they know,
And how that none rejoiceth to quail and crouch alow.

"I have spoken the words, beloved, to thy matchless glory and worth;
But thy heart to my heart hath been speaking, though my tongue hath set it forth:
For I am she that loveth, and I know what thou wouldst teach
From the heart of thine unlearned wisdom, and I needs must speak thy speech."

Then words were weary and silent, but oft and o'er again
They craved and kissed rejoicing, and their hearts were full and fain.

Then spake the Son of Sigmund: "Fairest, and most of worth,
Hast thou seen the ways of man-folk and the regions of the earth?
Then speak yet more of wisdom; for most meet meseems it is
That my soul to thy soul be shapen, and that I should know thy bliss."

So she took his right hand meekly, nor any word would say,
Not e'en of love or praising, his longing to delay;
And they sat on the side of Hindfell, and their fain eyes looked and loved,
As she told of the hidden matters whereby the world is moved:
And she told of the framing of all things, and the houses of the heaven;
And she told of the star-worlds' courses, and how the winds be driven;
And she told of the Norns and their names, and the fate that abideth the earth;

And she told of the ways of King-folk in their anger and their mirth;
 And she spake of the love of women, and told of the flame that burns,
 And the fall of mighty houses, and the friend that falters and turns,
 And the lurking blinded vengeance, and the wrong that amendeth wrong,
 And the hand that repenteth its stroke, and the grief that endureth for long;
 And how man shall bear and forbear, and be master of all that is;
 And how man shall measure it all, the wrath, and the grief, and the bliss.

"I saw the body of Wisdom, and of shifting guise was she wrought,
 And I stretched out my hands to hold her, and a mote of the dust they caught;
 And I prayed her to come for my teaching, and she came in the midnight dream—
 And I woke and might not remember, nor betwixt her tangle deem:
 She spake, and how might I hearken; I heard, and how might I know;
 I knew, and how might I fashion, or her hidden glory show?
 All things I have told thee of Wisdom are but fleeting images
 Of her hosts that abide in the heavens, and her light that Allfather sees:
 Yet wise is the sower that sows, and wise is the reaper that reaps,
 And wise is the smith in his smiting, and wise is the warder that keeps:
 And wise shalt thou be to deliver, and I shall be wise to desire;
 —And lo, the tale that is told, and the sword and the wakening fire!
 Lo now, I am she that loveth, and hark how Greyfell neighs,
 And Fafnir's Bed is gleaming, and green go the downward ways,
 The road to the children of men and the deeds that thou shalt do
 In the joy of thy life-days' morning, when thine hope is fashioned anew.
 Come now, O Bane of the Serpent, for now is the high-noon come,
 And the sun hangeth over Hindfell and looks on the earth-folk's home;
 But the soul is so great within thee, and so glorious are thine eyes,
 And me so love constraineth, and mine heart that was called the wise,
 That we twain may see men's dwellings and the house where we shall dwell,
 And the place of our life's beginning, where the tale shall be to tell."

So they climb the burg of Hindfell, and hand in hand they fare,
 Till all about and above them is nought but the sunlit air,
 And there close they cling together rejoicing in their mirth;
 For far away beneath them lie the kingdoms of the earth,
 And the garths of men-folk's dwellings and the streams that water them,
 And the rich and plenteous acres, and the silver ocean's hem,
 And the woodland wastes and the mountains, and all that holdeth all;
 The house and the ship and the island, the loom and the mine and the stall,
 The beds of bane and healing, the crafts that slay and save,
 The temple of God and the Doom-ring, the cradle and the grave.

Then spake the Victory-Wafer: "O King of the Earthly Age,
 As a God thou beholdest the treasure and the joy of thine heritage,
 And where on the wings of his hope is the spirit of Sigurd borne?
 Yet I bid thee hover awhile as a lark alow on the corn;
 Yet I bid thee look on the land 'twixt the wood and the silver sea
 In the bight of the swirling river, and the house that cherished me!
 There dwelleth mine earthly sister and the king that she hath wed;
 There morn by morn aforetime I woke on the golden bed;
 There eve by eve I tarried mid the speech and the lays of kings;
 There noon by noon I wandered and plucked the blossoming things;
 The little land of Lymdale by the swirling river's side,
 Where Brynhild once was I called in the days ere my father died;
 The little land of Lymdale 'twixt the woodland and the sea,
 Where on thee mine eyes shall brighten and thine eyes shall beam on me."

"I shall seek thee there," said Sigurd, "when the day-spring is begun,
Ere we wend the world together in the season of the sun."

"I shall bide thee there," said Brynhild, "till the fulness of the days,
And the time for the glory appointed, and the springing-tide of praise."

From his hand then draweth Sigurd Andvari's ancient Gold;
There is nought but the sky above them as the ring together they hold,
The shapen ancient token, that hath no change nor end,
No change, and no beginning, no flaw for God to mend:
Then Sigurd cries: "O Brynhild, now hearken while I swear,
That the sun shall die in the heavens and the day no more be fair,
If I seek not love in Lymdale and the house that fostered thee,
And the land where thou awakedst 'twixt the woodland and the sea!"

And she cried: "O Sigurd, Sigurd, now hearken while I swear
That the day shall die for ever and the sun to blackness wear,
Ere I forget thee, Sigurd, as I lie 'twixt wood and sea
In the little land of Lymdale and the house that fostered me!"

Then he set the ring on her finger and once, if ne'er again,
They kissed and clung together, and their hearts were full and fain.

So the day grew old about them and the joy of their desire,
And eve and the sunset came, and faint grew the sunset fire,
And the shadowless death of the day was sweet in the golden tide;
But the stars shone forth on the world, and the twilight changed and died;
And sure if the first of man-folk had been born to that starry night,
And had heard no tale of the sunrise, he had never longed for the light:
But Earth longed amidst her slumber, as 'neath the night she lay,
And fresh and all abundant abode the deeds of Day.

1 BRYNHILD.

In this book is told of the deeds of sigurd, and of his sojourn with the niblungs, and in the end of how he died.

Of the Dream of Gudrun the Daughter of Giuki.

And now of the Niblung people the tale beginneth to tell,
How they deal with the wind and the weather; in the cloudy drift they dwell
When the war is awake in the mountains, and they drive the desert spoil,
And their weaponed hosts unwearied through the misty hollows toil;
But again in the eager sunshine they scour across the plain,
And spear by spear is quivering, and rein is laid by rein,
And the dust is about and behind them, and the fear speeds on before,
As they shake the flowery meadows with the fleeting flood of war.
Yea, when they come from the battle, and the land lies down in peace,
No less in gear of warriors they gather earth's increase,
And helmed as the Gods of battle they drive the team afield:
These come to the council of elders with sword and spear and shield,
And shout to their war-dukes' dooming of their uttermost desire:
These never bow the helm-crest before the High-Gods' fire
But show their swords to Odin, and cry on Vingi-Thor
With the dancing of the ring-mail and the smitten shields of war:
Yet though amid their high-tides of the deaths of men they sing,
And of swords in the battle broken, and the fall of many a king,
Yet they sing it wreathed with the flowers and they praise the gift and the gain
Of the war-lord sped to Odin as he rends the battle atwain.

And their days are young and glorious, and in hope exceeding great
With sword and harp and beaker on the skirts of the Norns they wait.

Now the King of this folk is Giuki, and he sits in the Niblung hall
When the song of men goes roofward and the shields shine out from the wall;
And his queen in the high-seat sitteth, the woman overwise,
Grimhild the kin of the God-folk, the wife of the glittering eyes:
And his sons on each hand are sitting; there is Gunnar the great and fair,
With the lovely face of a king 'twixt the night of his wavy hair:
And there is the wise-heart Hogni; and his lips are close and thin,
And grey and awful his eyen, and a many sights they win:
And there is Guttorm the youngest, of the fierce and wandering glance,
And the heart that never resteth till the swords in the war-wind dance:
And there is Gudrun his daughter, and light she stands by the board,
And fair are her arms in the hall as the beaker's flood is poured:
She comes, and the earls keep silence; she smiles, and men rejoice;
She speaks, and the harps unsmitten thrill faint to her queenly voice.

So blossom the days of the Niblungs, and great is their hope's increase
'Twixt the merry days of battle and the tide of their guarded peace:
There is many a noon of joyance, and many an eve's delight,
And many a deed for the doing 'twixt the morning and the night.

Now betimes on a morning of summer that Giuki's daughter arose,
Alone went the fair-armed Gudrun to her flowery garden-close;
And she went by the bower of women, and her damsels saw her thence,
And her nurse went down to meet her as she came by the rose-hung fence,
And she saw that her eyes were heavy as she trod with doubtful feet
Betwixt the rose and the lily, nor blessed the blossoms sweet:
And she spake:

"What ails thee, daughter, as one asleep to tread
O'er the grass of the merry summer and the daisies white and red?
And to have no heart for the harp-play, or the needle's mastery,
Where the gold and the silk are framing the Swans of the Goths on the sea,
And helms and shields of warriors, and Kings on the hazelled isle?
Why hast thou no more joyance on the damsels' glee to smile?
Why biddest thou not to the wild-wood with horse and hawk and hound?
Why biddest thou not to the heathland and the eagle-haunted ground
To meet thy noble brethren as they ride from the mountain-road?
Hast thou deemed the hall of the Niblungs a churlish poor abode?
Wouldst thou wend away from thy kindred, and scorn thy fosterer's praise?
—Or is this the beginning of love and the first of the troublous days?"

Then spake the fair-armed Gudrun: "Nay, nought I know of scorn
For the noble kin of the Niblungs, or the house where I was born;
No pain of love hath smit me, and no evil days begin,
And I shall be fain tomorrow of the deeds that the maidens win:
But if I wend the summer in dull unlovely seeming,
It comes of the night, O mother, and the tide of last night's dreaming."

Then spake the ancient woman: "Thy dream to me shalt thou show;
Such oft foretell but the weather, and the airts whence the wind shall blow."

Blood-red was waxen Gudrun, and she said: "But little it is:
Meseems I sat by the door of the hall of the Niblungs' bliss,
And from out of the north came a falcon, and a marvellous bird it was;
For his feathers were all of gold, and his eyes as the sunlit glass,
And hither and thither he flew about the kingdoms of Kings,
And the fear of men went with him, and the war-blast under his wings:

But I feared him never a deal, nay, hope came into my heart,
And meseemed in his war-bold ways I also had a part;
And my eyes still followed his wings as hither and thither he swept
O'er the doors and the dwellings of King-folk; till the heart within me leapt,
For over the hall of the Niblungs he hung a little space,
Then stooped to my very knees, and cried out kind in my face:
And fain and full was my heart, and I took him to my breast,
And fair methought was the world and a home of infinite rest."
Her speech dropped dead as she spake, and her eyes from the nurse she turned,
But now and again thereafter the flush in her fair cheek burned,
And her eyes were dreamy and great, as of one who looketh afar.

But the nurse laughed out and answered: "Such the dreams of maidens are;
And if thou hast told me all 'tis a goodly dream, forsooth:
For what should I call this falcon save a glorious kingly youth,
Who shall fly full wide o'er the world in fame and victory,
Till he hangs o'er the Niblung dwelling and stoops to thy very knee?
And fain and full shall thine heart be, when his cheek shall cherish thy breast,
And fair things shalt thou deem of the world as a place of infinite rest."

But cold grew the maiden's visage: "God wot thou hast plenteous lore
In the reading of dreams, my mother; but thou lovest thy fosterling sore,
And the good and the evil alike shall turn in thine heart to good;
Wise too is my mother Grimhild, but I fear her guileful mood,
Lest she love me overmuch, and fashion all dreams to ill.
Now who is the wise of woman, who herein hath measureless skill?
For her forthright would I find, how far soever I fare,
Lest I wend like a fool in the world, and rejoice with my feet in the snare."

Quoth the nurse: "Though the dream be goodly and its reading easy and light,
It is nought but a little matter if thy golden wain be dight,
And thou ride to the land of Lymdale, the little land and green,
And come to the hall of Brynhild, the maid and the shielded Queen,
The Queen and the wise of women, who sees all haps to come:
And 'twill be but light to bid her to seek thy dream-tale home;
Though surely shall she arede it in e'en such wise as I;
And so shall the day be merry and the summer cloud go by."

"Thou hast spoken well," said Gudrun, "let us tarry now no whit;
For wise in the world is the woman, and knoweth the ways of it."

So they make the yoke-beasts ready, and dight the wains for the way,
And the maidens gather together, and their bodies they array,
And gird the laps of the linen, and do on the dark-blue gear,
And bind with the leaves of summer the wandering of their hair:
Then they drive by dale and acre, o'er heath and holt they wend,
Till they come to the land of the waters, and the lea by the woodland's end;
And there is the burg of Brynhild, the white-walled house and long,
And the garth her fathers fashioned before the days of wrong.
So fare their feet on the earth by the threshold of the Queen,
And Brynhild's damsels abide them, for their goings had been seen;
And the mint and the blossomed woodruff they strew before their feet,
And their arms of welcome take them, and they kiss them soft and sweet,
And they go forth into the feast-hall, the many-pillared house;
Most goodly were its hangings and its webs were glorious
With tales of ancient fathers, and the Swans of the Goths on the sea,
And weaponed Kings on the island, and great deeds yet to be;
And the host of Odin's Choosers, and the boughs of the fateful Oak,
And the gush of Mimir's Fountain, and the Midworld-Serpent's yoke.

So therein the maidens enter, but Gudrun all out-goes,
 As over the leaves of the garden shines the many-folded rose:
 Amidst and alone she standeth; in the hall her arms shine white,
 And her hair falls down behind her like a cloak of the sweet-breathed night,
 As she casts her cloak to the earth, and the wind of the flowery tide
 Runs over her rippling raiment and stirs the gold at her side.
 But she stands and may scarce move forward, and a red flush lighteth her face
 As her eyes seek out Queen Brynhild in the height of the golden place.

But lo, as a swan on the sea spreads out her wings to arise
 From the face of the darksome ocean when the isle before her lies,
 So Brynhild arose from her throne and the fashioned cloths of blue
 When she saw the Maid of the Niblung, and the face of Gudrun knew;
 And she gathers the laps of the linen, and they meet in the hall, they twain,
 And she taketh her hands in her hands and kisseth her sweet and fain:
 And she saith: "Hail, sister and queen! for we deem thy coming kind:
 Though forsooth the hall of Brynhild is no weary way to find:
 How fare the kin of the Niblung? is thy mother happy and hale,
 And the ancient of days, thy father, the King of all avail?"

"It is well with my house," said Gudrun, "and my brethren's days are fair,
 And my mother's morns are joyous, and her eves have done with care;
 And my father's heart is happy, and the Niblung glory grows,
 And the land in peace is lying 'neath the lily and the rose:
 But love and the mirth of summer have moved my heart to come
 To look on thy measureless beauty, and seek thy glory home."

"O be thou welcome!" said Brynhild; "it is good when queen-folk meet.
 Come now, O goodly sister, and sit in my golden seat:
 There are lovely hours before us, and the half of the summer day;
 And what is the night of summer that eve should drive thee away?"

So they sat, they twain, in the high-seat; and the maidens bore them wine,
 And they handled Dwarf-wrought treasures with their fingers fair and fine,
 And lovely they were together, and they marvelled each at each:
 Yet oft was Gudrun silent, and she faltered in her speech,
 As they matched great Kings and their war-deeds, and told of times that were,
 And their fathers' fathers' doings, and the deaths of war-lords dear.
 And at last the twain sat silent, and spake no word at all,
 And the western sky waxed ruddy, for the sun drew near its fall;
 And the speech of the murmuring maidens, and the voice of the toil of folk,
 Died out in the hall of Brynhild as the garden-song awoke.

Then Brynhild took up the word, and her voice was soft as she said:
 "We have told of the best of King-folk, the living and the dead;
 But hast thou heard, my sister, how the world grows fair with the word
 Of a King from the mountains coming, a great and marvellous lord,
 Who hath slain the Foe of the Gods, and the King that was wise from of old;
 Who hath slain the great Gold-wallower, and gotten the ancient Gold;
 And the hand of victory hath he, and the overcoming speech,
 And the heart and the eyes triumphant, and the lips that win and teach?"

Then met the eyes of the women, and Brynhild's word died out,
 And bright flushed Gudrun's visage, and her lips were moved with doubt.
 But again spake Brynhild the wise:

"He is come of a marvellous kin,
 And of men that never faltered, and goodly days shall he win:
 Yea now to this land is he coming, and great shall be his fame;
 He is born of the Volsung King-folk, and Sigurd is his name."

Then all the heart laughed in her, but the speech of her lips died out,
And red and pale waxed Gudrun, and her lips were moved with doubt,
Till she spake as a Queen of the Earth:
"Sister, the day grows late,
And meseemeth the watch of the earl-folk looks oft from the Niblung gate
For the gleam of our golden wains and the dust-cloud thin and soft;
But nought shall they now behold them till the moon-lamp blazeth aloft.
Farewell, and have thanks for thy welcome and thy glory that I have seen,
And I bid thee come to the Niblungs while the summer-ways are green,
That we thine heart may gladden as thou gladdenedst ours today."

And she rose and kissed her sweetly as one that wendeth away:
But Brynhild looked upon her and said: "Wilt thou depart,
And leave the word unspoken that lieth on thine heart?"

Then Gudrun faltered and spake: "Yea, hither I came in sooth,
With a dream for thine eyes of wisdom, and a prayer for thine heart of ruth:
But young in the world am I waxen, and the scorn of folk I fear
When I speak to the ears of the wise, and a maiden's dream they hear."

"I shall mock thee nought," said Brynhild; "yet who shall say indeed
But my heart shall fear thee rather, nor help thee in thy need?"

Then spake the daughter of Giuki: "Lo, this was the dream I dreamed:
For without by the door of the Niblungs I sat in the morn, as meseemed;
Then I saw a falcon aloft, and a glorious bird he was,
And his feathers glowed as the gold, and his eyes as the sunlit glass:
Hither and thither he flew about the kingdoms of Kings,
And fear was borne before him, and death went under his wings:
Yet I feared him not, but loved him, and mine eyes must follow his ways,
And the joy came into my heart, and hope of the happy days:
Then over the hall of the Niblungs he hung a little space
And stooped to my very knees, and cried out kind in my face;
And fain and full was my heart, and I took him to my breast,
And I cherished him soft and warm, for I deemed I had gotten the best."

So speaketh the Maid of the Niblungs, and speech her lips doth fail,
And she gazeth on Brynhild's visage, and seeth her waxen pale,
As she saith: "'Tis a dream full goodly, and nought hast thou to fear;
Some glory of Kings shall love thee and thine heart shall hold him dear."

Again spake the daughter of Giuki: "Not yet hast thou hearkened all:
For meseemed my breast was reddened, as oft by the purple and pall,
But my heart was heavy within it, and I laid my hand thereon,
And the purple of blood enwrapped me, and the falcon I loved was gone."

Yet pale was the visage of Brynhild, and she said: "Is it then so strange
That the wedding-lords of the Niblungs their lives in the battle should change?
Thou shalt wed a King and be merry, and then shall come the sword,
And the edges of hate shall be whetted and shall slay thy love and thy lord,
And dead on thy breast shall he fall: and where then is the measureless moan?
From the first to the last shalt thou have him, and scarce shall he die alone.
Rejoice, O daughter of Giuki! there is worse in the world than this:
He shall die, and thou shalt remember the days of his glory and bliss."

"I woke, and I wept," said Gudrun, "for the dear thing I had loved:
Then I slept, and again as aforetime were the gates of the dream-hall moved,
And I went in the land of shadows; and lo I was crowned as a queen,
And I sat in the summer-season amidst my garden green;
And there came a hart from the forest, and in noble wise he went,
And bold he was to look on, and of fashion excellent

Before all beasts of the wild-wood; and fair gleamed that glorious-one,
 And upreared his shining antlers against the very sun.
 So he came unto me and I loved him, and his head lay kind on my knees,
 And fair methought the summer, and a time of utter peace.
 Then darkened all the heavens and dreary grew the tide,
 And medreamed that a queen I knew not was sitting by my side,
 And from out of the din and the darkness, a hand and an arm there came,
 And a golden sleeve was upon it, and red rings of the Queen-folk's fame:
 And the hand was the hand of a woman: and there came a sword and a thrust
 And the blood of the lovely wood-deer went wide about the dust.
 Then I cried aloud in my sorrow, and lo, in the wood I was,
 And all around and about me did the kin of the wild-wolves pass.
 And I called them friends and kindred, and upreared a battle-brand,
 And cried out in a tongue that I knew not, and red and wet was my hand.
 Lo now, the dream I have told thee, and nought have I held aback.
 O Brynhild, what wilt thou tell me of treason and murder and wrack?"

Long Brynhild stood and pondered and weary-wise was her face,
 And she gazed as one who sleepeth, till thus she spake in a space:
 "One dream in twain hast thou told, and I see what I saw e'en now,
 But beyond is nought but the darkness and the measureless midnight's flow:
 Thy dream is all areded; I may tell thee nothing more:
 Thou shalt live and love and lose, and mingle in murder and war.
 Is it strange, O child of the Niblungs, that thy glory and thy pain
 Must be blent with the battle's darkness and the unseen hurrying bane?
 Do ye, of all folk on the earth, pray God for the changeless peace,
 And not for the battle triumphant and the fruit of fame's increase?
 For the rest, thou mayst not be lonely in thy welfare or thy woe,
 But hearts with thine heart shall be tangled: but the queen and the hand thou shalt know.
 When we twain are wise together; thou shalt know of the sword and the wood,
 Thou shalt know of the wild-wolves' howling and thy right-hand wet with blood,
 When the day of the smith is ended, and the stithy's fire dies out,
 And the work of the master of masters through the feast-hall goeth about."

They stand apart by the high-seat, and each on each they gaze
 As though they forgot the summer, and the tide of the passing days,
 And abode the deeds unborn and the Kings' deaths yet to be,
 As the merchant bideth deedless the gold in his ships on the sea.

At last spake the wise-heart Brynhild: "O glorious Niblung child!
 The dreams and the word we have hearkened, and the dreams and the word have been wild.
 Thou hast thy life and thy summer, and the love is drawing anear;
 Take these to thine heart to cherish, and deem them good and dear,
 Lest the Norns should mock our knowledge and cast our fame aside,
 And our doom be empty of glory as the hopeless that have died.
 Farewell, O Niblung Maiden! for day on day shall come
 Whilst thou shalt live rejoicing mid the blossom of thine home.
 Now have thou thanks for thy greeting and thy glory that I have seen;
 And come thou again to Lymdale while the summer-ways are green."

So the hall-dusk deepens upon them till the candles come arow,
 And they drink the wine of departing and gird themselves to go;
 And they dight the dark-blue raiment and climb to the wains aloft
 While the horned moon hangs in the heaven and the summer wind blows soft.
 Then the yoke-beasts strained at the collar, and the dust in the moon arose,
 And they brushed the side of the acre and the blooming dewy close;
 Till at last, when the moon was sinking and the night was waxen late,
 The warders of the earl-folk looked forth from the Niblung gate,

And saw the gold pale-gleaming, and heard the wain-wheels crush
The weary dust of the summer amidst the midnight hush.
So came the daughter of Giuki from the hall of Brynhild the queen
When the days of the Niblungs blossomed and their hope was springing green.

How the folk of Lymdale met Sigurd the Volsung in the woodland.

Full fair was the land of Lymdale, and great were the men thereof,
And Heimir the King of the people was held in marvellous love;
And his wife was the sister of Brynhild, and the Queen of Queens was she;
And his sons were noble striplings, and his daughters sweet to see;
And all these lived on in joyance through the good days and the ill,
Nor would shun the war's awaking; but now that the war was still
They looked to the wethers' fleeces and what the ewes would yield,
And led their bulls from the straw-stall, and drave their kine afield;
And they dealt with mere and river and all waters of their land,
And cast the glittering angle, and drew the net to the strand,
And searched the rattling shallows, and many a rock-walled well,
Where the silver-scaled sea-farers, and the crook-lipped bull-trout dwell.
But most when their hearts were merry 'twas the joy of carle and quean
To ride in the deeps of the oak-wood, and the thorny thicket green:
Forth go their hearts before them to the blast of the strenuous horn,
Where the level sun comes dancing down the oaks in the early morn:
There they strain and strive for the quarry, when the wind hath fallen dead
In the odorous dusk of the pine-wood, and the noon is high o'erhead:
There oft with horns triumphant their rout by the lone tree turns,
When over the bison's lea-land the last of sunset burns;
Or by night and cloud all eager with shaft on string they fare,
When the wind from the elk-mead setteth, or the wood-boar's tangled lair:
For the wood is their barn and their storehouse, and their bower and feasting-hall,
And many an one of their warriors in the woodland war shall fall.

So now in the sweet spring season, on a morn of the sunny tide
Abroad are the Lymdale people to the wood-deers' house to ride:
And they wend towards the sun's uprising, and over the boughs he comes,
And the merry wind is with him, and stirs the woodland homes;
But their horns to his face cast clamour, and their hooves shake down the glades,
And the hearts of their hounds are eager, and oft they redden blades;
Till at last in the noon they tarry in a daisied wood-lawn green,
And good and gay is their raiment, and their spears are sharp and sheen,
And they crown themselves with the oak-leaves, and sit, both most and least,
And there on the forest venison and the ancient wine they feast;
Then they wattle the twigs of the thicket to bear their spoil away,
And the toughness of the beech-boughs with the woodbine overlay:
With the voice of their merry labour the hall of the oakwood rings,
For fair they are and joyous as the first God-fashioned Kings.

Now they gather their steeds together, that ere the moon is born
The candles of King Heimir may shine on harp and horn:
But as they stand by the stirrup and hand on rein is laid,
All eyes are turned to beholding the eastward-lying glade,
For thereby comes something glorious, as though an earthly sun
Were lit by the orb departing, lest the day should be wholly done;
Lo now, as they stand astonied, a wonder they behold,
For a warrior cometh riding, and his gear is all of gold;
And grey is the steed and mighty beneath that lord of war,

And a treasure of gold he beareth, and the gems of the ocean's floor:
 Now they deem the war-steed wondrous and the treasure strange they deem,
 But so exceeding glorious doth the harnessed rider seem,
 That men's hearts are all exalted as he draweth nigh and nigher,
 And there are they abiding in fear and great desire:
 For they look on the might of his limbs, and his waving locks they see,
 And his glad eyes clear as the heavens, and the wreath of the summer tree
 That girdeth the dread of his war-helm, and they wonder at his sword,
 And the tinkling rings of his hauberk, and the rings of the ancient Hoard:
 And they say: Are the Gods on the earth? did the world change yesternight?
 Are the sons of Odin coming, and the days of Baldur the bright?

 But forth stood Heimir the ancient, and of Gods and men was he chief
 Of all who have handled the harp; and he stood betwixt blossom and leaf,
 And thrust his spear in the earth and cast abroad his hands:
 "Hail, thou that ridest hither from the North and the desert lands!
 Now thy face is turned to our hall-door and thereby must be thy way;
 And, unless the time so presseth that thou ridest night and day,
 It were good that thou lie in my house, and hearken the clink of the horn,
 Whether peace in thy hand thou bear us, or war on thy saddle be borne;
 Whether wealth thou seek, or friends, or kin, or a maiden lost,
 Or hast heart for the building of cities nor wilt hold thee aback for the cost;
 If fame thou wilt have among King-folk, to the land of the Kings art thou come,
 Or wouldst thou adown to the sea-flood, thou must pass by the garth of our home.
 Yea art thou a God from the heavens, who wilt deem me little of worth,
 And art come for the wrack of my realm and wilt cast King Heimir forth,
 Thou knowest I fear thee nothing, and no worse shall thy welcome be:
 Or art thou a wolf of the hearth, none here shall meddle with thee:—
 Yet lo, as I look on thine eyen, and behold thy hope and thy mirth,
 Meseems thou art better than these, some son of the Kings of the Earth."

 Then spake the treasure-bestrider,—for his horse e'en now had he reined
 By the King and the earls of the people where the boughs of the thicket waned:—
 "Yea I am a son of the Kings; but my kin have passed away,
 And once were they called the Volsungs, and the sons of God were they:
 I am young, but have learned me wisdom; I am lone, but deeds have I done;
 I have slain the Foe of the Gods, and the Bed of the Worm have I won.
 But meseems that the earth is lovely, and that each day springeth anew
 And beareth the blossom of hope, and the fruit of deeds to do.
 And herein thou sayest the sooth, that I seek the fame of Kings,
 And with them would I do and undo and be heart of their warfarings:
 And for this o'er the Glittering Heath to the kingdoms of earth am I come,
 And over the head of Hindfell, and I seek the earl-folk's home
 That is called the lea of Lymdale 'twixt the wood and the water-side;
 For men call it the gate of the world where the Kings of Men abide:
 Nor the least of God-folk am I, nor the wolf of the Kings accursed,
 But Sigurd the son of Sigmund in the land of the Helper nursed:
 And I thank thee, lord, for thy bidding, and tonight will I bide in thine hall,
 And fare on the morrow to Lymdale and the deeds thenceforward to fall."

 Then Sigurd leapt from Greyfell, and men were marvelling there
 At the sound of his sweet-mouthed wisdom, and his body shapen fair.
 But Heimir laughed and answered: "Now soon shall the deeds befall,
 And tonight shalt thou ride to Lymdale and tonight shalt thou bide in my hall:
 For I am the ancient Heimir, and my cunning is of the harp,
 Though erst have I dealt in the sword-play while the edge of war was sharp."

 Then Sigurd joyed to behold him, for a god-like King he was,

And amid the men of Lymdale did the Son of Sigmund pass;
 And their hearts are high uplifted, for across the air there came
 A breath of his tale half-spoken and the tidings of his fame;
 And their eyes are all unsatiate of gazing on his face,
 For his like have they never looked on for goodliness and grace.
 So they bear him the wine of welcome, and then to the saddle they leap
 And get them forth from the wood-ways to the lea-land of the sheep,
 And the bull-fed Lymdale meadows; and thereover Sigurd sees
 The long white walls of Heimir amidst the blossomed trees:
 Then the slim moon rises in heaven, and the stars in the tree-tops shine,
 But the golden roof of Heimir looks down on the torch-lit wine,
 And the song of men goes roofward in praise of Sigmund's Son,
 And a joy to the Lymdale people is his glory new-begun.

How Sigurd met Brynhild in Lymdale.

So there abideth Sigurd with the Lymdale forest-lords
 In mighty honour holden, and in love beyond all words,
 And thence abroad through the people there goeth a rumour and breath
 Of the great Gold-wallower's slaying, and the tale of the Glittering Heath,
 And a word of the ancient Treasure and Greyfell's gleaming Load;
 And the hearts of men grew eager, and the coming deeds abode.
 But warily dealeth Sigurd, and he wends in the woodland fray
 As one whose heart is ready and abides a better day:
 In the woodland fray he fareth, and oft on a day doth ride
 Where the mighty forest wild-bulls and the lonely wolves abide;
 For as then no other warfare do the lords of Lymdale know,
 And the axe-age and the sword-age seem dead a while ago,
 And the age of the cleaving of shields, and of brother by brother slain,
 And the bitter days of the whoredom, and the hardened lust of gain;
 But man to man may hearken, and he that soweth reaps,
 And hushed is the heart of Fenrir in the wolf-den of the deeps.
 Now is it the summer-season, and Sigurd rideth the land,
 And his hound runs light before him, and his hawk sits light on his hand,
 And all alone on a morning he rides the flowery sward
 Betwixt the woodland dwellings and the house of Lymdale's lord;
 And he hearkens Greyfell's going as he wends adown the lea,
 And his heart for love is craving, and the deeds he deems shall be;
 And he hears the Wrath's sheath tinkling as he rides the daisies down
 And he thinks of his love laid safely in the arms of his renown.
 But lo, as he rides the meadows, before him now he sees
 A builded burg arising amid the leafy trees,
 And a white-walled house on its topmost with a golden roof-ridge done,
 And thereon the clustering dove-kind in the brightness of the sun.
 So Sigurd stayed to behold it, for the heart within him laughed,
 But e'en then, as the arrow speedeth from the mighty archer's draught,
 Forth fled the falcon unhooded from the hand of Sigurd the King,
 And up, and over the tree-boughs he shot with steady wing:
 Then the Volsung followed his flight, for he looked to see him fall
 On the fluttering folk of the doves, and he cried the backward call
 Full oft and over again; but the falcon heeded it nought,
 Nor turned to his kingly wrist-perch, nor the folk of the pigeons sought,
 But flew up to a high-built tower, and sat in the window a space,

Crying out like the fowl of Odin when the first of the morning they face,
And then passed through the open casement as an erne to his eyrie goes.

Much marvelled the Son of Sigmund, and rode to the fruitful close:
For he said: Here a great one dwelleth, though none have told me thereof,
And he shall give me my falcon, and his fellowship and love.
So he came to the gate of the garth, and forth to the hall-door rode,
And leapt adown from Greyfell, and entered that fair abode;
For full lovely was it fashioned, and great was the pillared hall,
And fair in its hangings were woven the deeds that Kings befall,
And the merry sun went through it and gleamed in gold and horn;
But afield or a-fell are its carles, and none labour there that morn,
And void it is of the maidens, and they weave in the bower aloft,
Or they go in the outer gardens 'twixt the rose and the lily soft:
So saith Sigurd the Volsung, and a door in the corner he spies
With knots of gold fair-carven, and the graver's masteries:
So he lifts the latch and it opens, and he comes to a marble stair,
And aloft by the same he goeth through a tower wrought full fair.
And he comes to a door at its topmost, and lo, a chamber of Kings,
And his falcon there by the window with all unruffled wings.

But a woman sits on the high-seat with gold about her head,
And ruddy rings on her arms, and the grace of her girdle-stead;
And sunlit is her rippled linen, and the green leaves lie at her feet,
And e'en as a swan on the billow where the firth and the out-sea meet.
On the dark-blue cloths she sitteth, so fair and softly made
Are her limbs by the linen hidden, and so white is she arrayed.
But a web of gold is before her, and therein by her shuttle wrought
The early days of the Volsungs and the war by the sea's rim fought,
And the crowned queen over Sigmund, and the Helper's pillared hall,
And the golden babe uplifted to the eyes of duke and thrall;
And there was the slender stripling by the knees of the Dwarf-folk's lord,
And the gift of the ancient Gripir, and the forging of the Sword;
And there were the coils of Fafnir, and the hooded threat of death,
And the King by the cooking-fire, and the fowl of the Glittering Heath;
And there was the headless King-smith and the golden halls of the Worm,
And the laden Greyfell faring through the land of perished storm;
And there was the head of Hindfell, and the flames to the sky-floor driven;
And there was the glittering shield-burg, and the fallow bondage riven;
And there was the wakening woman and the golden Volsung done,
And they twain o'er the earthly kingdoms in the lonely evening sun:
And there were fells and forests, and towns and tossing seas,
And the Wrath and the golden Sigurd for ever blent with these,
In the midst of the battle triumphant, in the midst of the war-kings' fall,
In the midst of the peace well-conquered, in the midst of the praising hall.

There Sigurd stood and marvelled, for he saw his deeds that had been,
And his deeds of the days that should be, fair wrought in the golden sheen:
And he looked in the face of the woman, and Brynhild's eyes he knew,
But still in the door he tarried, and so glad and fair he grew,
That the Gods laughed out in the heavens to see the Volsung's seed;
And the breeze blew in from the summer and over Brynhild's weed,
Till his heart so swelled with the sweetness that the fair word stayed in his mouth,
And a marvel beloved he seemeth, as a ship new-come from the south:
And still she longed and beheld him, nor foot nor hand she moved
As she marvelled at her gladness, and her love so well beloved.
But at last through the sounds of summer the voice of Sigurd came,

And it seemed as a silver trumpet from the house of the fateful fame;
And he spake: "Hail, lady and queen! hail, fairest of all the earth!
Is it well with the hap of thy life-days, and thy kin and the house of thy birth?"

She said: "My kin is joyous, and my house is blooming fair,
And dead, both root and branches, is the tree of their travail and care."

He spake: "I have longed, I have wondered if thy heart were well at ease,
If the hope of thy days had blossomed and born thee fair increase."

"O have thou thanks," said Brynhild, "for thine heart that speaketh kind!
Yea, the hope of my days is accomplished, and no more there is to find."

And again she spake in a space: "The road hath been weary and long,
But well hast thou ridden it, Sigurd, and the sons of God are strong."

He said: "I have sought, O Brynhild, and found the heart of thine home;
And no man hath asked or holpen, and all unbidden I come."

She said: "O welcome hither! for the heart of the King I knew,
And thine hope that overcometh, and thy will that nought shall undo."

"Unbidden I came," he answered, "yet it is but a little space
Since I heard thy voice on the mountain, and thy kind lips cherished my face."

She rose from the dark-blue raiment, and trembling there she stood,
And no word her lips had gotten that her heart might deem it good:
And his heart went forth to meet her, yet nought he moved for a while,
Until the God-kin's laughter brake blooming from a smile
And he cried: "It is good, O Brynhild, that we draw exceeding near,
Lest Odin mock Kings' children that the doom of fate they fear."

Then forth she stepped from the high-seat, and forth from the threshold he came,
Till both their bodies mingling seemed one glory and the same,
And far o'er all fulfilment did the souls within them long,
As at breast and at lips of the faithful the earthly love strained strong;
And fresh from the deeps of the summer the breeze across them blew,
But nought of the earth's desire, or the lapse of time they knew.

Then apart, but exceeding nigh, for a little while they stand,
Till Brynhild toucheth her lord, and taketh his hand in her hand,
And she leadeth him through the chamber, and sitteth down in her seat;
And him she setteth beside her, and she saith:
"It is right and meet
That thou sit in this throne of my fathers, since thy gift today I have:
Thou hast given it altogether, nor aught from me wouldst save;
And thou knowest the tale of women, how oft it haps on a day
That of such gifts men repent them, and their lives are cast away."

He said: "I have cast it away as the tiller casteth the seed,
That the summer may better the spring-tide, and the autumn winter's need:
For what were the fruit of our lives if apart they needs must pass,
And men shall say hereafter: Woe worth the hope that was!"

She said: "That day shall dawn the best of all earthly days
When we sit, we twain, in the high-seat in the hall of the people's praise:
Or else, what fruit of our life-days, what fruit of our death shall be?
What fruit, save men's remembrance of the grief of thee and me?"

He said: "It is sharper to bear than the bitter sword in the breast,
O woe, to think of it now in the days of our gleanings of rest!"

Said Brynhild: "I bid thee remember the word that I have sworn,
How the sun shall turn to blackness, and the last day be outworn,
Ere I forget thee, Sigurd, and the kindness of thy face."

And they kissed and the day grew later and noon failed the golden place.
 But Sigurd said: "O Brynhild, remember how I swore
 That the sun should die in the heavens and day come back no more,
 Ere I forget thy wisdom and thine heart of inmost love.
 Lo now, shall I unsay it, though the Gods be great above,
 Though my life should last for ever, though I die tomorrow morn,
 Though I win the realm of the world, though I sink to the thrall-folk's scorn?"
 She said: "Thou shalt never unsay it, and thy heart is mine indeed:
 Thou shalt bear my love in thy bosom as thou helpst the earth-folk's need:
 Thou shalt wake to it dawning by dawning; thou shalt sleep and it shall not be strange:
 There is none shall thrust between us till our earthly lives shall change.
 Ah, my love shall fare as a banner in the hand of thy renown,
 In the arms of thy fame accomplished shall it lie when we lay us adown.
 O deathless fame of Sigurd! O glory of my lord!
 O birth of the happy Brynhild to the measureless reward!"
 So they sat as the day grew dimmer, and they looked on days to come,
 And the fair tale speeding onward, and the glories of their home;
 And they saw their crowned children and the kindred of the kings,
 And deeds in the world arising and the day of better things;
 All the earthly exaltation, till their pomp of life should be passed,
 And soft on the bosom of God their love should be laid at the last.
 But when words have a long while failed them, and the night is nigh at hand,
 They arise in the golden glimmer, and apart and anigh they stand:
 Then Brynhild stooped to the Wrath, and touched the hilts of the sword,
 Ere she wound her arms round Sigurd and cherished the lips of her lord:
 Then sweet were the tears of Brynhild, and fast and fast they fell,
 And the love that Sigurd uttered, what speech of song may tell?
 But he turned and departed from her, and her feet on the threshold abode
 As he went through the pillared feast-hall, and forth to the night he rode:
 So he turned toward the dwelling of Heimir and his love and his fame seemed one,
 And all full-well accomplished, what deeds soe'er were done:
 And the love that endureth for ever, and the endless hope he bore.
 As he faced the change of Heaven and the chance of worldly war.

Of Sigurd's riding to the Niblungs.

What aileth the men of Lyndale, that their house is all astir?
 Shall the hunt be up in the forest, or hath the shield-hung fir
 Brought war from the outer ocean to their fish-belovèd stream?
 Or have the piping shepherds beheld the war-gear gleam
 Adown the flowery sheep-dales? or betwixt the poplars grey
 Have the neat-herds seen the banners of the drivers of the prey?
 No, the forest shall be empty of the Lyndale men this morn,
 And the wells of the Lyndale river have heard no battle-horn,
 Nor the sheep in the flowery hollows seen any painted shield,
 And nought from the fear of warriors bide the neat-herds from the field;
 Yet full is the hall of Heimir with eager earls of war,
 And the long-locked happy shepherds are gathered round the door,
 And the smith has left his stithy, and the wife has left her rock,
 And the bright thrums hang unwinded by the maiden's weaving-stock:
 And there is the wife and the maiden, the elder and the boy;
 And scarce shall you tell what moves them, much sorrow or great joy.

But lo, as they gather and hearken by the door of Heimir's hall,
The wave of a mighty music on the souls of men doth fall,
And they bow their heads and hush them, because for a dear guest's sake
Is Heimir's hand in the harp-strings and the ancient song is awake,
And the words of the Gods' own fellow, and the hope of days gone by;
Then deep is that song-speech laden with the deeds that draw anigh,
And many a hope accomplished, and many an unhopèd change,
And things of all once spoken, now grown exceeding strange;
Then keen as the battle-piercer the stringèd speech arose,
And the hearts of men went with it, as of them that meet the foes;
Then soared the song triumphant as o'er the world well won,
Till sweet and soft it ended as a rose falls 'neath the sun;
But thereafter was there silence till the earls cast up the shout,
And the whole house clashed and glittered as the tramp of men bore out,
And folk fell back before them; then forth the earl-folk pour,
And forth comes Heimir the Ancient and stands by his fathers' door:
And then is the feast-hall empty and none therein abides:
For forth on the cloudy Greyfell the Son of Sigmund rides,
And the Helm of Awe he beareth, and the Mail-coat all of gold,
That hath not its like in the heavens nor has earth of its fellow told,
And the Wrath to his side is girded, though the peace-strings wind it round,
Yet oft and again it singeth, and strange is its sheathèd sound:
But beneath the King in his war-gear and beneath the wondrous Sword
Are the red rings of the Treasure, and the gems of Andvari's Hoard,
And light goes Greyfell beneath it, and oft and o'er again
He neighs out hope of battle, for the heart of the beast is fain.

So there sitteth Sigurd the Volsung, and is dight to ride his ways,
For the world lies fair before him and the field of the people's praise;
And he kisseth the ancient Heimir, and hailleth the folk of the land,
And he crieth kind and joyous as the reins lie loose in his hand:
"Farewell, O folk of Lymdale, and your joy of the summer-tide!
For the acres whiten, meseemeth, and the harvest-field is wide:
Who knows of the toil that shall be, when the reaping-hook gleams grey,
And the knees of the strong are loosened in the afternoon of day?
Who knows of the joy that shall be, when the reaper cometh again,
And his sheaves are crowned with the blossoms, and the song goes up from the wain?
But now let the Gods look to it, to hinder or to speed!
But the love and the longing I know, and I know the hand and the deed."

And he gathered the reins together, and set his face to the road,
And the glad steed neighed beneath him as they fared from the King's abode,
And out past the dewy closes; but the shouts went up to the sky,
Though some for very sorrow forbore the farewell cry,
Nor was any man but heavy that the godlike guest should go;
And they craved for that glad heart guileless, and that face without a foe.
But Greyfell fareth onward, and back to the dusky hall
Now goeth the ancient Heimir, and back to bower and stall,
And back to hammer and shuttle go earl and carle and quean;
And piping in the noontide adown the hollows green
Go the yellow-headed shepherds amidst the scattered sheep;
And all hearts a dear remembrance and a hope of Sigurd keep.

But forth by dale and lealand doth the Son of Sigmund wend,
Till far away lies Lymdale and the folk of the forest's end;
And he rides a heath unpeopled and holds the westward way,
Till a long way off before him come up the mountains grey;

Grey, huge beyond all telling, and the host of the heapèd clouds,
 The black and the white together, on that rock-wall's coping crowds;
 But whiles are rents athwart them, and the hot sun pierceth through,
 And there glow the angry cloud-caves 'gainst the everlasting blue,
 And the changeless snow amidst it; but down from that cloudy head
 The scars of fires that have been show grim and dusky-red;
 And lower yet are the hollows striped down by the scanty green,
 And lingering flecks of the cloud-host are tangled there-between,
 White, pillowy, lit by the sun, unchanged by the drift of the wind.

Long Sigurd looked and marvelled, and up-raised his heart and his mind;
 For he deemed that beyond that rock-wall bode his changèd love and life
 On the further side of the battle, and the hope, and the shifting strife:
 So up and down he rideth, till at even of the day
 A hill's brow he o'ertoppeth that had hid the mountains grey;
 Huge, blacker they showed than aforetime, white hung the cloud-flecks there,
 But red was the cloudy crown, for the sun was sinking fair:
 A wide plain lay beneath him, and a river through it wound
 Betwixt the lea and the acres, and the misty orchard ground;
 But forth from the feet of the mountains a ridgèd hill there ran
 That upreared at its hithermost ending a builded burg of man;
 And Sigurd deemed in his heart as he looked on the burg from afar,
 That the high Gods scarce might win it, if thereon they fell with war;
 So many and great were the walls, so bore the towers on high
 The threat of guarded battle, and the tale of victory.

Then swift he hasteneth downward, lest day be wholly spent
 Ere he come to the gate well warded, and the walls' beleaguerment;
 For his heart is eager to hearken what men-folk therein dwell
 And the name of that noble dwelling, and the tale that it hath to tell.
 So he rides by the tilth of the acres, 'twixt the overhanging trees,
 And but seldom now and again a glimpse of the burg he sees,
 Till he comes to the flood of the river, and looks up from the balks of the bridge;
 Then how was the plain grown little 'neath that mighty burg of the ridge
 O'erhung by the cloudy mountains and the ash of another day,
 Whereto the slopes clomb upward till the green died out in the grey,
 And the grey in the awful cloud-land, where the red rents went and came
 Round the snows no summers minish and the far-off sunset flame:
 But lo, the burg at the ridge-end! have the Gods been building again
 Since they watched the aimless Giants pile up the wall of the plain,
 The house for none to dwell in? Or in what days lived the lord
 Who 'neath those thunder-forges upreared that battle's ward?
 Or was not the Smith at his work, and the blast of his forges awake,
 And the world's heart poured from the mountain for that ancient people's sake?
 For as waves on the iron river of the days whereof nothing is told
 Stood up the many towers, so stark and sharp and cold;
 But dark-red and worn and ancient as the midmost mountain-sides
 Is the wall that goeth about them; and its mighty compass hides
 Full many a dwelling of man whence the reek now goeth aloft,
 And the voice of the house-abiders, the sharp sounds blent with the soft:
 But one house in the midst is unhidden and high up o'er the wall it goes;
 Aloft in the wind of the mountains its golden roof-ridge glows,
 And down mid its buttressed feet is the wind's voice never still;
 And the day and the night pass o'er it and it changes to their will,
 And whiles is it glassy and dark, and whiles is it white and dead,
 And whiles is it grey as the sea-mead, and whiles is it angry red;

And it shimmers under the sunshine and grows black to the threat of the storm,
And dusk its gold roof glimmers when the rain-clouds over it swarm,
And bright in the first of the morning its flame doth it uplift,
When the light clouds rend before it and along its furrows drift.

Upriseth the heart of Sigurd, but ever he rideth forth
Till he comes to the garth and the gateway built up in the face of the north:
Then e'en as a wind from the mountains he heareth the warders' speech,
As aloft in the mighty towers they clamour each to each:
Then horn to horn blew token, and far and shrill they cried,
And he heard, as the fishers hearken the cliff-fowl over the tide:
But he rode in under the gate, that was long and dark as a cave
Bored out in the isles of the northland by the beat of the restless wave;
And the noise of the winds was within it, and the sound of swords unseen,
As the night when the host is stirring and the hearts of Kings are keen.
But no man stayed or hindered, and the dusk place knew his smile,
And into the court of the warriors he came forth after a while,
And looked aloft to the hall-roof, high up and grey as the cloud,
For the sun was wholly perished; and there he crieth aloud:

"Ho, men of this mighty burg, to what folk of the world am I come?
And who is the King of battles who dwells in this lordly home?
Or perchance are ye of the Elf-kin? are ye guest-fain, kind at the boards
Or murder-churls and destroyers to gain and die by the sword?"

Then the spears in the forecourt glittered and the swords shone over the wall,
But the song of smitten harp-strings came faint from the cloudy hall.
And he hearkened a voice and a crying: "The house of Giuki the King,
And the Burg of the Niblung people and the heart of their warfaring."
There were many men about him, and the wind in the wall-nook sang,
And the spears of the Niblungs glittered, and the swords in the forecourt rang.
But they looked on his face in the even, and they hushed their voices and gazed,
For fear and great desire the hearts of men amazed.

Now cometh an earl to King Giuki as he sits in godlike wise
With his sons, the Kings of battle, and his wife of the glittering eyes,
And the King cries out at his coming to tell why the watch-horns blew;
But the earl saith: "Lord of the people, choose now what thou wilt do;
For here is a strange new-comer, and he saith, to thee alone
Will he tell of his name and his kindred, and the deeds that his hand hath done.
But he beareth a Helm of Aweing and a Hauberk all of gold,
That hath not its like in the heavens nor has earth of its fellow told;
And strange is all his raiment, and he beareth a Dwarf-wrought sword,
And his war-steed beareth beneath him red rings of a mighty Hoard,
And the ancient gems of the sea-floor: there he sits on his cloud-grey steed,
And his eyes are bright in the even, and we deem him mighty indeed,
And our hearts are upraised at his coming; but how shall I tell thee or say
If he be a King of the Kings and a lord of the earthly day,
Or if rather the Gods be abroad and he be one of these?
But forsooth no battle he biddeth, nor craveth he our peace.
So choose herein, King Giuki, wilt thou bid the man begone
To his house of the earth or the heavens, lest a worser deed be won,
Or wilt thou bid him abide in the Niblung peace and love?
And meseems if thus thou doest, thou shalt never repent thee thereof."

Then uprose the King of the Niblungs, and was clad in purple and pall,
And his sheathed sword lay in his hand, as he gat him adown the hall,
And abroad through the Niblung doorway; and a mighty man he was,
And wise and ancient of days: so there by the earls doth he pass,

And beholdeth the King on the war-steed and looketh up in his face:
 But Sigurd smileth upon him in the Niblungs' fencèd place,
 As the King saith: "Gold-bestrider, who into our garth wouldst ride,
 Wilt thou tell thy name to a King, who biddeth thee here abide
 And have all good at our hands? for unto the Niblungs' home
 And the heart of a war-fain people from the weary road are ye come;
 And I am Giuki the King; so now if thou nam'st thee a God,
 Look not to see me tremble; for I know of such that have trod
 Unfeared in the Burg of the Niblungs; nor worser, nor better at all
 May fare the folk of the Gods than the Kings in Giuki's hall;
 So I bid thee abide in my house, and when many days are o'er,
 Thou shalt tell us at last of thine errand, if thou bear us peace or war."

Then all rejoiced at his word till the swords on the bucklers rang,
 And adown from the red-gold Treasure the Son of Sigmund sprang,
 And he took the hand of Giuki, and kissed him soft and sweet,
 And spake: "Hail, ancient of days! for thou biddest me things most meet,
 And thou knowest the good from the evil: few days are over and gone
 Since my father was old in the world ere the deed of my making was won;
 But Sigmund the Volsung he was, full ripe of years and of fame;
 And I, who have never beheld him, am Sigurd called of name;
 Too young in the world am I waxen that a tale thereof should be told,
 And yet have I slain the Serpent, and gotten the Ancient Gold,
 And broken the bonds of the weary, and ridden the Wavering Fire.
 But short is mine errand to tell, and the end of my desire:
 For peace I bear unto thee, and to all the kings of the earth,
 Who bear the sword aright, and are crowned with the crown of worth;
 But unpeace to the lords of evil, and the battle and the death;
 And the edge of the sword to the traitor, and the flame to the slanderous breath:
 And I would that the loving were loved, and I would that the weary should sleep,
 And that man should hearken to man, and that he that soweth should reap.
 Now wide in the world would I fare, to seek the dwellings of Kings,
 For with them would I do and undo, and be heart of their warfarings;
 So I thank thee, lord, for thy bidding, and here in thine house will I bide,
 And learn of thine ancient wisdom till forth to the field we ride."

Glad then was the murmur of folk, for the tidings had gone forth,
 And its breath had been borne to the Niblungs, and the tale of Sigurd's worth.

But the King said: "Welcome, Sigurd, full fair of deed and of word!
 And here mayst thou win thee fellows for the days of the peace and the sword;
 For not lone in the world have I lived, but sons from my loins have sprang,
 Whose deeds with the rhyme are mingled, and their names with the people's tongue."

Then he took his hand in his hand, and into the hall they passed,
 And great shouts of salutation to the cloudy roof were cast;
 And they rang from the glassy pillars, and the Gods on the hangings stirred,
 And afar the clustering eagles on the golden roof-ridge heard,
 And cried out on the Sword of the Branstock as they cried in the other days:
 Then the harps rang out in the hall, and men sang in Sigurd's praise;
 And a flood of great remembrance, and the tales of the years gone by
 Swept over the soul of Sigurd, and his fathers seemed anigh;
 And he looked to the cloudy hall-roof, and anigh seemed Odin the Goth,
 And the Valkyrs holding the garland, and the crown of love and of troth;
 And his soul swells up exalted, and he deems that high above,
 In the glorious house of the heavens, are the outstretched hands of his love;
 And she stoops to the cloudy feast-hall, and the wavering wind is her voice,
 And her odorous breath floats round him, as she bids her King rejoice.

But now on the daïs he meeteth the kin of Giuki the wise:
 Lo, here is the crownèd Grimhild, the queen of the glittering eyes;
 Lo, here is the goodly Gunnar with the face of a king's desire;
 Lo, here is Hogni that holdeth the wisdom tried in the fire;
 Lo, here is Guttorm the youngest, who longs for the meeting swords;
 Lo, here, as a rose in the oak-boughs, amid the Niblung lords
 Is the Maid of the Niblungs standing, the white-armed Giuki's child;
 And all these looked long on Sigurd and their hearts upon him smiled.

 So Grimhild greeted the guest, and she deemed him fair and sweet,
 And she deemed him mighty of men, and a king for the queen-folk meet.
 Then Gunnar the goodly war-king spake forth his greeting and speed,
 And deemed him noble and great, and a fellow for kings in their need:
 And Hogni gave him his greeting, and none his eyes might dim,
 And he smiled as the winter sun on the shipless ocean's rim.
 Then greeted him Guttorm the young, and cried out that his heart was glad
 That the Volsung lived in their house, that a King of the Kings they had.
 Then silent awhile the Maiden, the fair-armed Gudrun, stood,
 Yet might all men see by her visage that she deemed his coming good;
 But at last the gold she taketh, and before him doth she stand,
 And she poureth the wine of King-folk, and stretcheth forth her hand,
 And she saith: "Hail, Sigurd the Volsung! may I see thy joy increase,
 And thy shielded sons beside thee, and thy days grown old in peace!"

 And he took the cup from her hand, and drank, while his heart rejoiced
 At the Niblung Maiden's beauty, and her blessing lovely-voiced;
 And he thanked her well for the greeting, and no guile in his heart was grown,
 But he thought of his love enfolded in the arms of his renown.

 So the Niblungs feast glad-hearted through the undark night and kind,
 And the burden of all sorrow seems fallen far behind
 On the road their lives have wended ere that happiest night of nights,
 And the careless days and quiet seem but thieves of their delights;
 For their hearts go forth before them toward the better days to come,
 When all the world of glory shall be called the Niblungs' home:
 Yea, as oft in the merry season and the morning of the May
 The birds break out a-singing for the world's face waxen gay,
 And they flutter there in the blossoms, and run through the dewy grass,
 As they sing the joy of the spring-tide, that bringeth the summer to pass;
 And they deem that for them alone was the earth wrought long ago.
 And no hate and no repentance, and no fear to come they know;
 So fared the feast of the Niblungs on the eve that Sigurd came
 In the day of their deeds triumphant, and the blossom of their fame.

Of Sigurd's warfaring in the company of the Niblungs, and of his great fame and glory.

Now gone is the summer season and the harvest of the year,
 And amid the winter weather the deeds of the Niblungs wear;
 But nought is their joyance worsened, or their mirth-tide waxen less,
 Though the swooping mountain tempest howl round their ridgy ness,
 Though a house of the windy battle their streeted burg be grown,
 Though the heaped-up, huddled cloud-drift be their very hall-roofs crown,
 Though the rivers bear the burden, and the Rime-Gods grip and strive,
 And the snow in the mirky midnoon across the lealand drive.

 But lo, in the stark midwinter how the war is smitten awake,
 And the blue-clad Niblung warriors the spears from the wall-nook take,
 And gird the dusky hauberk, and the ruddy fur-coat don,

And draw the yellowing ermine o'er the steel from Welshland won.
Then they show their tokened war-shields to the moon-dog and the stars,
For the hurrying wind of the mountains has borne them tale of wars.
Lo now, in the court of the warriors they gather for the fray,
Before the sun's uprising, in the moonless morn of day;
And the spears by the dusk gate glimmer, and the torches shine on the wall,
And the murmuring voice of women comes faint from the cloudy hall:
Then the grey dawn beats on the mountains mid a drift of frosty snow,
And all men the face of Sigurd mid the swart-haired Niblungs know;
And they see his gold gear glittering mid the red fur and the white,
And high are the hearts uplifted by the hope of happy fight;
And they see the sheathed Wrath shimmer mid the restless Welsh-wrought swords,
And their hearts rejoice beforehand o'er the fall of conquered lords;
And they see the Helm of Aweing and the awful eyes beneath,
And they deem the victory glorious, and fair the warrior's death.

So forth through that cave of the gate from the Niblung Burg they fare,
And they turn their backs on the plain, and the mountain-slopes they dare,
And the place of the slaked earth-forges, as the eastering wind shall lead,
And but few swords bide behind them the Niblung Burg to heed.
But lo, in the jaws of the mountains how few and small they seem,
As dusky-strange in the snow-drifts their knitted hauberks gleam:
Lo, now at the mountains' outmost 'neath Sigurd's gleaming eyes
How wide in the winter season the citted lealand lies:
Lo, how the beacons are flaring, and the bell-swayed steeples rock,
And the gates of cities are shaken with the back-swung door-leaves' shock:
And, lo, the terror of towns, and the land that the winter wards,
And over the streets snow-muffled the clash of the Niblung swords.

But the slaves of the Kings are gathered, and their host the battle abides,
And forth in the front of the Niblungs the golden Sigurd rides;
And Gunnar smites on his right hand, and Hogni smites on the left,
And glad is the heart of Guttorm, and the Southland host is cleft
As the grey bill reapeth the willows in the autumn of the year,
When the fish lie still in the eddies, and the rain-flood draweth anear.

Now sheathed is the Wrath of Sigurd; for as wax withstands the flame,
So the Kings of the land withstood him and the glory of his fame.
And before the grass is growing, or the kine have fared from the stall,
The song of the fair-speech-masters goes up in the Niblung hall,
And they sing of the golden Sigurd and the face without a foe,
And the lowly man exalted and the mighty brought alow:
And they say, when the sun of summer shall come aback to the land,
It shall shine on the fields of the tiller that fears no heavy hand;
That the sheaf shall be for the plougher, and the loaf for him that sowed,
Through every furrowed acre where the Son of Sigmund rode.

Full dear was Sigurd the Volsung to all men most and least,
And now, as the spring drew onward, 'twas deemed a goodly feast
For the acre-biders' children by the Niblung Burg to wait,
If perchance the Son of Sigmund should ride abroad by the gate:
For whosoever feared him, no little-one, forsooth,
Would shrink from the shining eyes and the hand that clave out truth
From the heart of the wrack and the battle: it was then, as his gold gear burned
O'er the balks of the bridge and the river, that oft the mother turned,
And spake to the laughing baby: "O little son, and dear,
When I from the world am departed, and whiles a-nights ye hear
The best of man-folk longing for the least of Sigurd's days,

Thou shalt hearken to their story, till they tell forth all his praise,
And become beloved and a wonder, as thou sayest when all is sung,
'And I too once beheld him in the days when I was young.'"

Men say that the white-armed Gudrun, the lovely Giuki's child,
Looked long on Sigurd's visage in the winter weather wild
On the eve of the Kings' departure; and she bore him wine and spake:
"Thou goest to the war, O Sigurd, for the Niblung brethren's sake;
And so women send their kindred on many a doubtful tide,
And dead full oft on the death-field shall the hope of their lives abide;
Nor must they fear beforehand, nor weep when all is o'er;
But thou, our guest and our stranger, thou goest to the war,
And who knows but thine hand may carry the hope of all the earth;
Now therefore if thou deemest that my prayer be aught of worth,
Nor wilt scorn the child of a Niblung that prays for things to come,
Pledge me for thy glad returning, and the sheaves of fame borne home!"

He laughed, for his heart was merry for the seed of battle sown,
For the fruit of love's fulfilment, and the blossom of renown;
And he said: "I look in the wine-cup and I see goodwill therein;
Be merry, Maid of the Niblungs; for these are the prayers that win!"

He drank, and the soul within him to the love and the glory turned,
And all unmoved was her visage, howso her heart-strings yearned.

But again when the bolt of battle on the sleeping kings had been hurled,
And the gold-tipped cloud of the Niblungs had been sped on the winter world,
And once more in that hall of the stories was dight triumphant feast,
And in joy of soul past telling sat all men most and least,
There stood the daughter of Giuki by the king-folk's happy board,
And grave and stern was Gudrun as the wine of kings she poured:
But Sigurd smiled upon her, and he said:

"O maid, rejoice

For thy pledge's fair redeeming, and the hope of thy kindly voice!
Thou hast prayed for the guest and the stranger, and, lo, from the battle and wrack
Is the hope of the Niblungs blossomed, and thy brethren's lives come back."

She turned and looked upon him, and the flush ran over her face,
And died out as the summer lightning, that scarce endureth a space;
But still was her visage troubled, as she said: "Hast thou called me kind
Because I feared for earth's glory when point and edge are blind?
But now is the night as the day, when thou bringest my brethren home,
And back in the arms of thy glory the Niblung hope has come."

But his eyes look kind upon her, and the trouble passeth away,
And there in the hall of the Niblungs is dark night as glorious day.

Now spring o'er the winter prevaieth, and the blossoms brighten the field;
But lo, in the flowery lealands the gleam of spear and shield,
For swift to the tidings of warfare speeds on the Niblung folk,
And the Kings to the sea are riding, and the battle-laden oak.
Now the isle-abiders tremble, and the dwellers by the sea
And the nesses flare with the beacons, and the shepherds leave the lea,
As the tale of the golden warrior speeds on from isle to isle.
Now spread is the snare of treason, and cast is the net of guile,
And the mirk-wood gleams with the ambush, and venom lurks at the board;
And whiles and again for a little the fair fields gleam with the sword,
And the host of the isle-folk gather, nigh numberless of tale:
But how shall its bulk and its writhing the willow-log avail
When the red flame lives amidst it? Lo now, the golden man

In the towns from of old time famous, by the temples tall and wan;
 How he wends with the swart-haired Niblungs through the mazes of the streets,
 And the hosts of the conquered outlands and their uncouth praying meets.
 There he wonders at their life-days and their fond imaginings,
 As he bears the love of Brynhild through the houses of the kings,
 Where his word shall do and undo, and with crowns of kings shall he deal;
 And he laughs to scorn the treasure where thieves break through and steal,
 And the moth and the rust are corrupting: and he thinks the time is long
 Till the dawning of love's summer from the cloudy days of wrong.

So they raise and abase and alter, then turn about and ride,
 Mid the peace of the sword triumphant, to the shell-strown ocean's side;
 And they bear their glory away to the mouth of the fishy stream,
 And again in the Niblung lealand doth the Welsh-wrought war-gear gleam,
 And they come to the Burg of the Niblungs and the mighty gate of war,
 And betwixt the gathered maidens through its dusky depths they pour,
 And with war-helms done with blossoms round the Niblung hall they sing
 In the windless cloudless even and the ending of the spring;
 Yea, they sing the song of Sigurd and the face without a foe,
 And they sing of the prison's rending and the tyrant laid alow,
 And the golden thieves' abasement, and the stilling of the churl,
 And the mocking of the dastard where the chasing edges whirl;
 And they sing of the outland maidens that thronged round Sigurd's hand,
 And sung in the streets of the foemen of the war-delivered land;
 And they tell how the ships of the merchants come free and go at their will,
 And how wives in peace and safety may crop the vine-clad hill;
 How the maiden sits in her bower, and the weaver sings at his loom,
 And forget the kings of grasping and the greedy days of gloom;
 For by sea and hill and township hath the Son of Sigmund been.
 And looked on the folk unheeded, and the lowly people seen.

Then into the hall of the Niblungs go the battle-staying earls,
 And they cast the spoil in the midmost; the webs of the out-sea pearls,
 And the gold-enwoven purple that on hated kings was bright;
 Fair jewelled swords accursèd that never flashed in fight;
 Crowns of old kings of battle that dastards dared to wear;
 Great golden shields dishonoured, and the traitors' battle-gear;
 Chains of the evil judges, and the false accusers' rings,
 And the cloud-wrought silken raiment of the cruel whores of kings.
 And they cried: "O King of the people, O Giuki old of years,
 Lo, the wealth that Sigurd brings thee from the fashioners of tears!
 Take thou the gift, O Niblung, that the Volsung seed hath brought!
 For we fought on the guarded fore-shore, in the guileful wood we fought;
 And we fought in the traitorous city, and the murder-halls of kings;
 And Sigurd showed us the treasure, and won us the ruddy rings
 From the jaws of the treason and death, and redeemed our lives from the snare,
 That the uttermost days might know it, and the day of the Niblungs be fair:
 And all this he giveth to thee, as the Gods give harvest and gain,
 And sit in their thrones of the heavens of the praise of the people fain."

Then Sigurd passed through the hall, and fair was the light of his eyes,
 And he came to King Giuki the ancient, and Grimhild the overwise,
 And stooped to the elder of days and kissed the war-wise head;
 And they loved him passing sore as a very son of their bed.
 But he stood in the sight of the people, and sweet he was to see,
 And no foe and no betrayer, and no envier now hath he:
 But Gunnar the bright in the battle deems him his earthly friend,

And Hogni is fain of his fellow, howso the day's work end,
 And Guttorm the young is joyous of the help and gifts he hath;
 And all these would shine beside him in the glory of his path;
 There is none to hate or hinder, or mar the golden day,
 And the light of love flows plenteous, as the sun-beams hide the way.

Now there was the white-armed Gudrun, the lovely Giuki's child,
 And her eyes beheld his glory, but her heart was unbeguiled,
 And the dear hope fainted in her: I am frail and weak, she saith,
 And he so great and glorious with the eyes that look on death!
 Yet she comes, and speaks before him as she bears the golden horn:
 "The world is glad, O Sigurd, that ever thou wert born,
 And I with the world am rejoicing: drink now to the Niblung bliss,
 That I, a deedless maiden, may thank thee well for this!"

So he drank of the cup at her bidding and laughed, and said, "Forsooth,
 Good-will with the cup is blended, and the very heart of ruth:
 Yet meseems thy words are merrier than thine inmost soul this eve;
 Nay, cast away thy sorrow, lest the Kings of battle grieve!"

She smiled and departed from him, and there in the cloudy hall
 To the feast of their glad returning the Niblung children fall;
 And far o'er the flowery lealand the shepherds of the plain
 Behold the litten windows, and know that Kings are fain.

So fares the tale of Sigurd through all kingdoms of the earth,
 And the tale is told of his doings by the utmost ocean's girth;
 And fair feast the merchants deem it to warp their sea-beat ships
 High up the Niblung River, that their sons may hear his lips
 Shed fair words o'er their ladings and the opened southland bales;
 Then they get them aback to their countries, and tell how all men's tales
 Are nought, and vain and empty in setting forth his grace,
 And the unmatched words of his wisdom, and the glory of his face.
 Came the wise men too from the outlands, and the lords of singers' fame,
 That men might know hereafter the deeds that knew his name;
 And all these to their lands departed, and bore aback his love,
 And cherished the tree of his glory, and lived glad in the joy thereof.

But men say that howsoever all other folk of earth
 Loved Sigmund's son rejoicing, and were bettered of their mirth,
 Yet ever the white-armed Gudrun, the dark-haired Niblung Maid,
 From the barren heart of sorrow her love upon him laid:
 He rejoiceth, and she droopeth; he speaks and hushed is she;
 He beholds the world's days coming, nought but Sigurd may she see;
 He is wise and her wisdom falters; he is kind, and harsh and strange
 Comes the voice from her bosom laden, and her woman's mercies change.
 He longs, and she sees his longing, and her heart grows cold as a sword,
 And her heart is the ravening fire, and the fretting sorrows' hoard.

Ah, shall she not wander away to the wilds and the wastes of the deer,
 Or down to the measureless sea-flood, and the mountain marish drear?
 Nay, still shall she bide and behold him in the ancient happy place,
 And speak soft as the other women with wise and queenly face.
 Woe worth the while for her sorrow, and her hope of life forlorn!
 —Woe worth the while for her loving, and the day when she was born!

Of the Cup of evil drink that Grimhild the Wise-wife gave to Sigurd.

Now again in the latter summer do those Kings of the Niblungs ride

To chase the sons of the plunder that curse the ocean-side:
 So over the oaken rollers they run the cutters down
 Till fair in the first of the deep are the glittering bows up-thrown;
 But, shining wet and steel-clad, men leap from the surfy shore,
 And hang their shields on the gunwale, and cast abroad the oar;
 Then full to the outer ocean swing round the golden beaks,
 And Sigurd sits by the tiller and the host of the spoilers seeks.
 But lo, by the rim of the out-sea where the masts of the Vikings sway,
 And their bows plunge down to the sea-floor as they ride the ridgy way,
 And show the slant decks covered with swords from stem to stern:
 Hark now, how the horns of battle for the clash of warriors yearn,
 And the mighty song of mocking goes up from the thousands of throats,
 As down the wind and landward the raven-banner floats:
 For they see thin streaks and shining o'er the waters' face draw nigh,
 And about each streak a foam-wake as the wet oars toss on high;
 And they shout; for the silent Niblungs round those great sea-castles throng,
 And the eager men unshielded swarm up the heights of wrong.
 Then from bulwark unto bulwark the Wrath's flame sings and leaps,
 And the unsteered manless dragons drift down the weltering deeps,
 And the waves toss up a shield-foam, and hushed are the clamorous throats
 And dead in the summer even the raven-banner floats,
 And the Niblung song goes upward, as the sea-burgs long accursed
 Are swept toward the field-folk's houses, and the shores they saddened erst:
 Lo there on the poop stands Sigurd mid the black-haired Niblung kings,
 And his heart goes forth before him toward the day of better things,
 And the burg in the land of Lymdale, and the hands that bide him there.

 But now with the spoil of the spoilers mid the Niblungs doth he fare,
 When the Kings have dight the beacons and the warders of the coast,
 That fire may call to fire for the swift redeeming host.
 Then they fare to the Burg of the people, and leave that lealand free
 That a maid may wend untroubled by the edges of the sea;
 And glad in the autumn season they sit them down again
 By the shrines of the Gods of the Niblungs, and the hallowed hearths of men.

 So there on an eve is Sigurd in the ancient Niblung hall,
 Where the cloudy hangings waver and the flickering shadows fall,
 And he sits by the Kings on the high-seat, and wise of men he seems,
 And of many a hidden marvel past thought of man he dreams:
 On the Head of Hindfell he thinketh, and how fair the woman was,
 And how that his love hath blossomed, and the fruit shall come to pass;
 And he thinks of the burg in Lymdale, and how hand met hand in love,
 Nor deems him aught too feeble the heart of the world to move;
 And more than a God he seemeth, and so steadfast and so great,
 That the sea of chance wide-weltering 'neath his will must needs abate.

 High riseth the glee of the people, and the song and the clank of the cup
 Beat back from pillar to pillar, to the cloud-blue roof go up;
 And men's hearts rejoice in the battle, and the hope of coming days,
 Till scarce may they think of their fathers, and the kings of bygone praise.

 But Giuki looketh on Sigurd and saith from heart grown fain:
 "To sit by the silent wise-one, how mighty is the gain!
 Yet we know this long while, Sigurd, that lovely is thy speech;
 Wilt thou tell us the tales of the ancient, and the words of masters teach?
 For the joy of our hearts is stormy with mighty battles won,
 And sweet shall be their lulling with thy tale of deeds agone."

Then they brought the harp to Sigurd, and he looked on the ancient man,
As his hand sank into the strings, and a ripple over them ran,
And he looked forth kind o'er the people, and all men on his glory gazed,
And hearkened, hushed and happy, as the King his voice upraised;
There he sang of the works of Odin, and the hails of the heavenly coast,
And the sons of God uprising, and the Wolfings' gathering host;
And he told of the birth of Rerir, and of Volsung yet unborn,
All the deeds of his father's father, and his battles overworn;
Then he told of Signy and Sigmund, and the changing of their lives;
Tales of great kings' departing, and their kindred and their wives.
But his song and his fond desire go up to the cloudy roof,
And blend with the eagles' shrilling in the windy night aloof.
So he made an end of his story, and he sat and longed full sore
That the days of all his longing as a story might be o'er:
But the wonder of the people, and their love of Sigurd grew,
And green grew the tree of the Volsungs, as the Branstock blossomed anew.
Now up rose Grimhild the wise-wife, and she stood by Sigurd and said:
"There is none of the kings of kingdoms that may match thy goodlihead:
Lo now, thou hast sung of thy fathers; but men shall sing of thee,
And therewith shall our house be remembered, and great shall our glory be.
I beseech thee hearken a little to a faithful word of mine,
When thou of this cup hast drunken; for my love is blent with the wine."
He laughed and took the cup: But therein with the blood of the earth
Earth's hidden might was mingled, and deeds of the cold sea's birth,
And things that the high Gods turn from, and a tangle of strange love,
Deep guile, and strong compelling, that whoso drank thereof
Should remember not his longing, should cast his love away,
Remembering dead desire but as night remembereth day.
So Sigurd looked on the horn, and he saw how fair it was scored
With the cunning of the Dwarf-kind and the masters of the sword;
And he drank and smiled on Grimhild above the beaker's rim,
And she looked and laughed at his laughter; and the soul was changed in him.
Men gazed and their hearts sank in them, and they knew not why it was,
Why the fair-lit hall was darkling, nor what had come to pass:
For they saw the sorrow of Sigurd, who had seen but his deeds erewhile,
And the face of the mighty darkened, who had known but the light of its smile.
But Grimhild looked and was merry: and she deemed her life was great,
And her hand a wonder of wonders to withstand the deeds of Fate:
For she saw by the face of Sigurd and the token of his eyes
That her will had abased the valiant, and filled the faithful with lies,
And blinded the God-born seer, and turned the steadfast athwart,
And smitten the pride of the joyous, and the hope of the eager heart;
The hush of the hall she hearkened, and the fear of men she knew,
But all this was a token unto her, and great pride within her grew,
As she saw the days that were coming from the well-spring of her blood;
Goodly and glorious and great by the kings of her kindred she stood,
And faced the sorrow of Sigurd, and her soul of that hour was fain;
For she thought: I will heal the smitten, I will raise up the smitten and slain,
And take heed where the Gods were heedless, and build on where they began,
And frame hope for the unborn children and the coming days of man.
Then she spake aloud to the Volsung: "Hear this faithful word of mine!
For the draught thou hast drunken, O Sigurd, and my love was blent with the wine:
O Sigurd, son of the mighty, thy kin are passed away,
But uplift thine heart and be merry, for new kin hast thou gotten today;

Thy father is Giuki the King, and Grimhild thy mother is made,
 And thy brethren are Gunnar and Hogni and Guttorm the unafraid.
 Rejoice for a kingly kindred, and a hope undreamed before!
 For the folk shall be wax in the fire that withstandeth the Niblung war;
 The waste shall bloom as a garden in the Niblung glory and trust,
 And the wrack of the Niblung people shall burn the world to dust:
 Our peace shall still the world, our joy shall replenish the earth;
 And of thee it cometh, O Sigurd, the gold and the garland of worth!"

But the heart was changed in Sigurd; as though it ne'er had been
 His love of Brynhild perished as he gazed on the Niblung Queen:
 Brynhild's beloved body was e'en as a wasted hearth,
 No more for bale or blessing, for plenty or for dearth.
 —O ye that shall look hereafter, when the day of Sigurd is done,
 And the last of his deeds is accomplished, and his eyes are shut in the sun,
 When ye look and long for Sigurd, and the image of Sigurd behold,
 And his white sword still as the moon, and his strong hand heavy and cold,
 Then perchance shall ye think of this even, then perchance shall ye wonder and cry,
 "Twice over, King, are we smitten, and twice have we seen thee die."

As folk of the summer feasters, who have fallen to feast in the morn,
 And have wreathed their brows with roses ere the first of the clouds was born;
 Beneath the boughs were they sitting, and the long leaves twinkled about,
 And the wind with their laughter was mingled, nor held aback from their shout,
 Amidst of their harp it lingered, from the mouth of their horn went up,
 Round the reek of their roast was it breathing, o'er the flickering face of their cup—
 —Lo now, why sit they so heavy, and why is their joy-speech dead,
 Why are the long leaves drooping, and the fair wind hushed overhead?—
 Look out from the sunless boughs to the yellow-mirky east,
 How the clouds are woven together o'er that afternoon of feast;
 There are heavier clouds above them, and the sun is a hidden wonder,
 It rains in the nether heaven, and the world is afraid with the thunder:
 E'en so in the hall of the Niblungs, and the holy joyous place,
 Sat the earls on the marvel gazing, and the sorrow of Sigurd's face.

Men say that a little after the evil of that night
 All waste is the burg of Brynhild, and there springeth a marvellous light
 On the desert hard by Lymdale, and few men know for why;
 But there are, who say that a wildfire thence roareth up to the sky
 Round a glorious golden dwelling, wherein there sitteth a Queen
 In remembrance of the wakening, and the slumber that hath been;
 Wherein a Maid there sitteth, who knows not hope nor rest
 For remembrance of the Mighty, and the Best come forth from the Best.

But the hushed Kings sat in the feast-hall, till Grimhild cried on the harp,
 And the minstrels' fingers hastened, and the sound rang clear and sharp
 Beneath the cloudy roof-tree, but no joyance with it went,
 And no voice but the eagles' crying with the stringèd song was blent;
 And as it began, it ended, and no soul had been moved by its voice,
 To lament o'er the days passed over, or in coming days to rejoice.
 Late groweth the night o'er the people, but no word hath Sigurd said,
 Since he laughed o'er the glittering Dwarf-gold and raised the cup to his head:
 No wrath in his eyes is arisen, no hope, nor wonder, nor fear;
 Yet is Sigurd's face as boding to folk that behold him anear,
 As the mountain that broodeth the fire o'er the town of man's delights,
 As the sky that is cursed nor thunders, as the God that is smitten nor smites.

So silent sitteth the Volsung o'er the blindness of the wrong,
 But night on the Niblungs waxeth, and their Kings for the morrow long,

And the morrow of tomorrow that the light may be fair to their eyes,
And their days as the days of the joyous: so now from the throne they arise,
And their men depart from the feast-hall, their care in sleep to lay,
But none durst speak with Sigurd, nor ask him, whither away,
As he strideth dumb from amidst them; and all who see him deem
That he heedeth the folk of the Niblungs but as people of a dream.
So they fall away from about him, till he stands in the forecourt alone;
Then he fares to the kingly stables, nor knoweth he his own,
Nor backeth the cloudy Greyfell, but a steed of the Kings he bestrides
And forth through the gate of the Niblungs and into the night he rides:
—Yea he with no deed before him, and he in the raiment of peace;
And the moon in the mid-sky wadeth, and is come to her most increase.

In the deedless dark he rideth, and all things he remembers save one,
And nought else hath he care to remember of all the deeds he hath done:
He hasteneth not nor stayeth; he lets the dark die out
Ere he comes to the burg of Brynhild and rides it round about;
And he lets the sun rise upward ere he rideth thence away,
And wendeth he knoweth not whither, and he weareth down the day;
Till lo, a plain and a river, and a ridge at the mountains' feet
With a burg of people builded for the lords of God-home meet.
O'er the bridge of the river he rideth, and unto the burg-gate comes
In no lesser wise up-builded than the gate of the heavenly homes:
Himseems that the gate-wards know him, for they cry out each to each,
And as whispering winds in the mountains he hears their far-off speech.
So he comes to the gate's huge hollow, and amidst its twilight goes,
And his horse is glad and remembers, and that road of King-folk knows;
And the winds are astir in its arches with the sound of swords unseen,
And the cries of kings departed, and the battles that have been.

So into a garth of warriors from that dusk he rideth out
And no man stayeth nor hindereth; there he gazeth round about,
And seeth a glorious dwelling, a mighty far-famed place,
As the last of the evening sunlight shines fair on his weary face;
And there is a hall before him, and huge in the even it lies,
A mountain grey and awful with the Dwarf-folk's masteries:
And the houses of men cling round it, and low they seem and frail,
Though the wise and the deft have built them for a long-enduring tale:
There the wind sings loud in the wall-nook, and the spears are sparks on the wall,
And the swords are flaming torches as the sun is hard on his fall:
He falls, and the even dusketh o'er that sword-renowned close,
But Sigurd bideth and broodeth for the Niblung house he knows,
And he hath a thought within him that he rideth forth from shame,
And that men have forgotten the greeting and are slow to remember his fame.

But forth from the hall came a shouting, and the voice of many men,
And he deemed they cried "Hail, Sigurd! thou art welcome home again!"
Then he looked to the door of the feast-hall and behold it seemed to him
That its wealth of graven stories with more than the dusk was dim;
With the waving of white raiment and the doubtful gleam of gold.
Then there groweth a longing within him, nor his heart will he withhold;
But he rideth straight to the doorway, and the stories of the door:
And there sitteth Giuki the ancient, the King, the wise of war,
And Grimhild the kin of the God-folk, the wife of the glittering eyes;
And there is the goodly Gunnar, and Hogni the overwise,
And Guttorm the young and the war-fain; and there in the door and the shade,
With eyes to the earth cast downward, is the white-armed Niblung Maid.

But all these give Sigurd greeting, and hail him fair and well;

And King Giuki saith:

"Hail, Sigurd! what tidings wilt thou tell

Of thy deeds since yestereven? or whitherward wentst thou?"

Then unto the earth leapt the Volsung, and gazed with doubtful brow

On the King and the Queen and the Brethren, and the white-armed Giuki's Child,

Yet amidst all these in a measure of his heavy heart was beguiled:

He spread out his hands before them, and he spake:

"O, what be ye,

Who ask of the deeds of Sigurd, and seek of the days to be?

Are ye aught but the Niblung children? for meseems I would ask for a gift,

But the thought of my heart is unstable, and my hope as the winter-drift;

And the words may not be shapen.—But speak ye, men of the earth,

Have ye any new-found tidings, or are deeds come nigh to the birth?

Are there knots for my sword to sunder? are there thrones for my hand to shake?

And to which of the Gods shall I give, and from which of the Kings shall I take?

Or in which of the houses of man-folk henceforward shall I dwell?

O speak, ye Niblung children, and the tale to Sigurd tell!"

None answered a word for a space; but Gudrun wept in the door,

And the noise of men came outward and of feet that went on the floor.

Then Grimhild stood before him, and took him by the hand,

And she said: "In the hall are gathered the earls of the Niblung land.

Come thou with the Mother of Kings and sit in thy place tonight,

That the cheer of the earls may be bettered, nor the war-dukes lose delight."

"Come, brother and king," said Gunnar, "for here of all the earth

Is the place that may not lack thee, and the folk that loves thy worth."

"Come, Sigurd the wise," said Hogni, "and so shall thy visage cheer

The folk that is bold for tomorrow, and the hearts that know no fear."

"Come, Sigurd the keen," said Guttorm, "for thy sword lies light in the sheath,

And oft shall we ride together to face the fateful death."

No word at all spake Gudrun, as she stood in the doorway dim,

But turned her face from beholding as she reached her hand to him.

Then Sigurd nought gainsaid them, but into the hall he passed,

And great shouts of salutation to the cloudy roof were cast,

And rang back from the glassy pillars, and the woven God-folk stirred,

And afar the clustering eagles on the golden roof-ridge heard,

And cried out on the Sword of the Branstock as they cried in other days;

And the harps rang out in the hall, and men sang in Sigurd's praise.

But he looked to the right and the left, and he knew there was ruin and lack,

And the death of yestereven, and the days that should never come back;

And he strove, but nought he remembered of the matters that he would,

Save that great was the flood of sorrow that had drowned his days of good:

Then he deemed that the sons of the earl-folk, e'en mid their praising word,

Were looking on his trouble as a people sore afeard;

And the gifts that the Gods had given the pride in his soul awoke,

And kindled was Sigurd's kindness by the trouble of the folk;

And he thought: I shall do and undo, as while ago I did,

And abide the time of the dawning, when the night shall be no more hid!

Then he lifted his head like a king, and his brow as a God's was clear,

And the trouble fell from the people, and they cast aside their fear;

And scarce was his glory abated as he sat in the seat of the Kings

With the Niblung brethren about him, and they spake of famous things,

And the dealings of lords of the earth; but he spake and answered again

And thrust by the grief of forgetting, and his tangled thought and vain,
And cast his care on the morrow, that the people might be glad.
Yet no smile there came to Sigurd, and his lips no laughter had;
But he seemeth a king o'er-mighty, who hath won the earthly crown,
In whose hand the world is lying, who no more heedeth renown.

But now speaketh Grimhild the Queen: "Rise, daughter of my folk,
For thou seest my son is weary with the weight of the careful yoke;
Go, bear him the wine of the Kings, and hail him over the gold,
And bless the King for his coming to the heart of the Niblung fold."

Upriseth the white-armed Gudrun, and taketh the cup in her hand;
Dead-pale in the night of her tresses by Sigurd doth she stand,
And strives with the thought within her, and finds no word to speak:
For such is the strength of her anguish, as well might slay the weak;
But her heart is a heart of the Queen-folk and of them that bear earth's kings,
And her love of her lord seems lovely, though sore the torment wrings,
—How fares it with words unspoken, when men are great enow,
And forth from the good to the good the strong desires shall flow?
Are they wasted e'en as the winds, the barren maids of the sky,
Of whose birth there is no man wotteth, nor whitherward they fly?

Lo, Sigurd lifteth his eyes, and he sees her silent and pale,
But fair as Odin's Choosers in the slain kings' wakening dale,
But sweet as the mid-fell's dawning ere the grass beginneth to move;
And he knows in an instant of time that she stands 'twixt death and love,
And that no man, none of the Gods can help her, none of the days,
If he turn his face from her sorrow, and wend on his lonely ways.
But she sees the change in his eyen, and her queenly grief is stirred,
And the shame in her bosom riseth at the long unspoken word,
And again with the speech she striveth; but swift is the thought in his heart
To slay her trouble for ever, and thrust her shame apart.
And he saith:

"O Maid of the Niblungs, thou art weary-faced this eve:
Nay, put thy trouble from thee, lest the shielded warriors grieve!
Or tell me what hath been done, or what deed have men forborne,
That here mid the warriors' joyance thy life-joy lieth forlorn?
For so may the high Gods help me, as nought so much I would,
As that round thine head this even might flit unmingled good!"

He seeth the love in her eyen, and the life that is tangled in his,
And the heart cries out within him, and man's hope of earthly bliss;
And again would he spare her the speech, as she strives with her longing sore.

"Here are glad men about us, and a joyous folk of war.
And they that have loved thee for long, and they that have cherished mine heart;
But we twain alone are woeful, as sad folk sitting apart.
Ah, if I thy soul might gladden! if thy lips might give me peace!
Then belike were we gladdest of all; for I love thee more than these.
The cup of goodwill that thou bearest, and the greeting thou wouldst say,
Turn these to the cup of thy love, and the words of the troth-plighting day;
The love that endureth for ever, and the never-dying troth,
To face the Norns' undoing, and the Gods amid their wrath."

Then he taketh the cup and her hands, and she boweth meekly adown,
Till she feels the arms of Sigurd round her trembling body thrown:
A little while she doubteth in the mighty slayer's arms
As Sigurd's love unhop'd-for her barren bosom warms;
A little while she struggleth with the fear of his mighty fame,

That grows with her hope's fulfilment; ruth rises with wonder and shame;
 For the kindness grows in her soul, as forgotten anguish dies,
 And her heart feels Sigurd's sorrow in the breast whereon she lies;
 Then the fierce love overwhelms her, and as wax in the fervent fire
 All dies and is forgotten in the sweetness of desire;
 And close she clingeth to Sigurd, as one that hath gotten the best
 And fair things of the world she deemeth, as a place of infinite rest.

Of the Wedding of Sigurd the Volsung.

That night sleeps Sigurd the Volsung, and awakes on the morrow-morn,
 And wots at the first but dimly what thing in his life hath been born:
 But the sun cometh up in the autumn, and the eve he remembered,
 And the word he hath given to Gudrun to love her to the death;
 And he longs for the Niblung maiden, that her love may cherish his heart,
 Lest e'en as a Godhead banished he dwell in the world apart:
 The new sun smiteth his body as he leaps from the golden bed,
 And doeth on his raiment and is fair apparelled;
 Then he goes his ways through the chambers, and greeteth none at all
 Till he comes to the garth and the garden in the nook of the Niblung wall.

Now therein, mid the yellowing leafage, and the golden blossoms spent,
 Alone and lovely and eager the white-armed Gudrun went;
 Swift then he hasteneth toward her, and she bideth his drawing near,
 And now in the morn she trembleth; for her love is blent with fear;
 And wonder is all around her, for she deemed till yestereve,
 When she saw the earls astonied, and the golden Sigurd grieve,
 That on some most mighty woman his joyful love was set;
 And love hath made her humble, and her race doth she forget,
 And her noble and mighty heart from the best of the Niblungs sprung,
 The sons of the earthly War-Gods of the days when the world was young.
 Yea she feareth her love and his fame, but she feareth his sorrow most,
 Lest he spake from a heart o'erladen and counted not the cost.
 But lo, the love of his eyen, and the kindness of his face!
 And joy her body burdens, and she trembleth in her place,
 And sinks in the arms that cherish with a faint and eager cry,
 And again on the bosom of Sigurd doth the head of Gudrun lie.

Fairer than yestereven doth Sigurd deem his love,
 And more her tender wooing and her shame his soul doth move;
 And his words of peace and comfort come easier forth from him,
 And woman's love seems wondrous amidst his trouble dim;
 Strange, sweet, to cling together! as oft and o'er again
 They crave and kiss rejoicing, and their hearts are full and fain.
 Then a little while they sunder, and apart and anigh they stand,
 And Sigurd's eyes grow awful as he stretcheth forth his hand,
 And his clear voice saith:

"O Gudrun, now hearken while I swear
 That the sun shall die for ever and the day no more be fair.
 Ere I forget thy pity and thine inmost heart of love!
 Yea, though the Kings be mighty, and the Gods be great above,
 I will wade the flood and the fire, and the waste of war forlorn,
 To look on the Niblung dwelling, and the house where thou wert born."
 Strange seemed the words to Sigurd that his gathering love compelled,
 And sweet and strange desire o'er his tangled trouble welled.

But bright flashed the eyes of Gudrun, and she said: "King, as for me,
If thou sawest the heart in my bosom, what oath might better thee?
Yet my words thy words shall cherish, as thy lips my lips have done.
—Herewith I swear, O Sigurd, that the earth shall hate the sun,
And the year desire but darkness, and the blossoms shrink from day,
Ere my love shall fail, beloved, or my longing pass away!"

Now they go from the garth and the garden, and hand in hand they come
To the hall of the kings of aforetime, and the heart of the Niblung home.
There they go 'neath the cloudy roof-tree, and on to the high-seat fair,
And there sitteth Giuki the ancient, and the guileful Grimhild is there,
With the swart-haired Niblung brethren; and all these are exceeding fain,
When they look on Sigurd and Gudrun, and the peace that enwrappeth the twain,
For in her is all woe forgotten, sick longing little seen,
And the shame that slayeth pity, and the self-scorn of a Queen;
And all doubt in love is swallowed, and lovelier now is she
Than a picture deftly painted by the craftsmen over sea;
And her face is a rose of the morning by the night-tide framed about,
And the long-stored love of her bosom from her eyes is leaping out.
But how fair is Sigurd the King that beside her beauty goes!
How lovely is he shapen, how great his stature shows!
How kind is the clasping right-hand, that hath smitten the battle acold!
How kind are the awful eyes that no foeman durst behold!
How sweet are the lips unsmiling, and the brow as the open day!
What man can behold and believe it, that his life shall pass away?
So he standeth proud by the high-seat, and the sun through the vast hall pours
And the Gods on the hangings waver as the wind goes by the doors,
And abroad are the sounds of man-folk, and the eagles cry from the roof,
And the ancient deeds of Sigmund seem fallen far aloof;
And dead are the fierce days fallen, and the world is soft and sweet,
As the Son of the Volsungs speaketh in noble words and meet:

"O hearken, King of the Niblungs, O ancient of the days!
Time was, when alone I wandered, and went on the wasteland ways,
And sore my soul desired the harvest of the sword:
Then I slew the great Gold-wallower, and won the ancient Hoard,
And I turned to the dwellings of men; for I longed for measureless fame,
And to do and undo with the Kings, and the pride of the Kings to tame;
And I longed for the love of the King-folk; but who desired my soul,
Who stayed my feet in his dwelling, who showed the weary the goal,
Who drew me forth from the wastes, and the bitter kinless dearth,
Till I came to the house of Giuki and the hallowed Niblung hearth?
Count up the deeds and forbearings, count up the words of the days
That show forth the love of the Niblungs and the ancient people's praise.
Nay, number the waves of the sea, and the grains of the yellow sand,
And the drops of the rain in the April, and the blades of the grassy land!
And what if one heart of the Niblungs had stored and treasured it all,
And hushed, and moved but softly, lest one grain thereof should fall?
If she feared the barren garden, and the sunless fallow field?
How then should the spring-tide labour, and the summer toil to yield!
And so may the high Gods help me, as I from this day forth
Shall toil for her exalting to the height of worldly worth,
If thou stretch thine hands forth, Giuki, and hail me for thy son:
Then there as thou sitt'st in thy grave-mound when thine earthly day is done,
Thou shalt hear of our children's children, and the crownèd kin of kings,
And the peace of the Niblung people in the day of better things;

And then mayst thou be merry of the eve when Sigurd came,
In the day of the deeds of the Niblungs and the blossom of their fame,
Stretch forth thine hands to thy son: for I bid thy daughter to wife,
And her life shall withhold my death-day, and her death shall stay my life.“

Then spoke the ancient Giuki: "Hail, Sigurd, son of mine eld!
And I bless the Gods for the day that mine ancient eyes have beheld:
Now let me depart in peace, since I know for very sooth
That waxen e'en as the God-folk shall the Niblungs blossom in youth.
Come, take thy mother's greeting, and let thy brethren say
How well they love thee, Sigurd, and how fair they deem the day.“

Then lowly bendeth Sigurd 'neath the guileful Grimhild's hand,
And he kisseth the Kings of the Niblungs, and about him there they stand,
The war-fain, darkling kindred; and all their words are praise,
And the love of the tide triumphant, and the hope of the latter days.

Hark now, on the morrow morning how the blast of the mighty horn
From the builded Burg of the Niblungs goes over the acres shorn,
And the roads are gay with the riders, and the bull in the stall is left,
And the plough is alone in the furrow, and the wedge in the hole half-cleft;
And late shall the ewes be folded, and the kine come home to the pail,
And late shall the fires be litten in the outmost treeless dale:
For men fare to the gate of Giuki and the ancient cloudy hall,
And therein are the earls assembled and the kings wear purple and pall,
And the flowers are spread beneath them, and the bench-cloths beaten with gold;
And the walls are strange and wondrous with the noble stories told:
For new-hung is the ancient dwelling with the golden spoils of the south,
And men seem merry for ever, and the praise is in each man's mouth,
And the name of Sigurd the Volsung, the King and the Serpent's Bane,
Who exalteth the high this morning and blesseth the masters of gain:
For men drink the bridal of Sigurd and the white-armed Niblung maid,
And the best with the best shall be mingled, and the gold with the gold o'erlaid.

So, fair in the hall is the feasting and men's hearts are uplifted on high,
And they deem that the best of their life-days are surely drawing anigh,
As now, one after other, uprise the scalds renowned,
And their well-belovèd voices awake the hoped-for sound,
In the midmost of the high-tide, and the joy of feasting lords.
Then cometh a hush and a waiting, and the light of many swords
Flows into the hall of Giuki by the doorway of the King,
And amid those flames of battle the war-clad warriors bring
The Cup of daring Promise and the hallowed Boar of Sôn,
And men's hearts grow big with longing and great is the hope-tide grown;
For bright the Son of Sigmund ariseth by the board,
And unwinds the knitted peace-strings that hamper Regin's Sword:
Then fierce is the light on the high-seat as men set down the Cup
Anigh the hand of Sigurd, and the edges blue rise up,
And fall on the hallowed Wood-beast: as a trump of the woeful war
Rings the voice of the mighty Volsung as he speaks the words of yore:
"By the Earth that groweth and giveth, and by all the Earth's increase
That is spent for Gods and man-folk; by the sun that shines on these;
By the Salt-Sea-Flood that beareth the life and death of men;
By the Heavens and Stars that change not, though earth die out again;
By the wild things of the mountain, and the houseless waste and lone;
By the prey of the Goths in the thicket and the holy Beast of Sôn,
I hallow me to Odin for a leader of his host,
To do the deeds of the highest, and never count the cost:

And I swear, that whatso great-one shall show the day and the deed,
I shall ask not why nor wherefore, but the sword's desire shall speed:
And I swear to seek no quarrel, nor to swerve aside for aught,
Though the right and the left be blooming, and the straight way wend to nought:
And I swear to abide and hearken the prayer of any thrall,
Though the war-torch be on the threshold and the foemen's feet in the hall:
And I swear to sit on my throne in the guise of the kings of the earth,
Though the anguish past amending, and the unheard woe have birth:
And I swear to wend in my sorrow that none shall curse mine eyes
For the scowl that quelleth beseeching, and the hate that scorneth the wise.
So help me Earth and Heavens, and the Under-sky and Seas,
And the Stars in their ordered houses, and the Norns that order these!"

And he drank of the Cup of the Promise, and fair as a star he shone,
And all men rejoiced and wondered, and deemed Earth's glory won.
Then came the girded maidens, and the slim earls' daughters poured,
And uprose the dark-haired Gunnar and bare was the Niblung sword;
Blue it gleamed in the hand of the folk-king as he laid it low on the Beast,
And took oath as the Goths of aforetime in the hush of the people's feast:
"I will work for the craving of Kings, and accomplish the will of the great,
Nor ask what God withstandeth, nor hearken the tales of fate;
When a King my life hath exalted, and wrought for my hope and my gain,
For every deed he hath done me, thereto shall I fashion twain.
I shall bear forth the fame of the Niblungs through all that hindereth;
In my life shall I win great glory, and be merry in my death."

So sweareth the lovely war-king and drinketh of the Cup,
And the joy of the people waxeth and their glad cry goeth up.
But again came the girded maidens: earls' daughters pour the wine,
And bare is the blade of Hogni in the feast-hall over the Swine;
Then he cries o'er the hallowed Wood-beast: "Earth, hearken, how I swear
To beseech no man for his helping, and to vex no God with prayer;
And to seek out the will of the Norns, and look in the eyes of the curse;
And to laugh while the love aboundeth, lest the glad world grow into worse;
Then if in the murder I laugh not, O Earth, remember my name,
And oft tell it aloud to the people for the Niblungs' fated shame!"

Then he drank of the Cup of the Promise, and all men hearkened and deemed
That his speech was great and valiant, and as one of the wise he seemed.

Then the linen-folded maidens of the earl-folk lift the gold
But the earls look each on the other, and Guttorm's place behold,
And empty it lieth before them; for the child hath wearied of peace,
And he sits by the oars in the East-seas, and winneth fame's increase.
Nor then, nor ever after, o'er the Holy Beast he spake,
When mighty hearts were exalted for the golden Sigurd's sake.

But now crieth Giuki the Ancient: "O fair sons, well have ye sworn,
And gladdened my latter-ending, and my kingly hours outworn;
Full fain from the halls of Odin on the world's folk shall I gaze
And behold all hearts rejoicing in the Niblungs' glorious days."

Glad cries of earls rose upward and beat on the cloudy roof,
And went forth on the drift of the autumn to the mountains far aloof:
Speech stirred in the hearts of the singers, and the harps might not refrain,
And they called on the folk of aforetime of the Niblung joy to be fain.

But Sigurd sitteth by Gudrun, and his heart is soft and kind,
And the pity swelleth within it for the days when he was blind;
And with yet another pity, lest his sorrow seen o'erweigh

Her fond desire's fulfilment, and her fair soul's blooming-day:
 And many a word he frameth his kingly fear to hide,
 And the tangle of his trouble, that her joy may well abide.
 But the joy so filleth Gudrun and the triumph of her bliss,
 That oft she sayeth within her: How durst I dream of this?
 How durst I hope for the days wherein I now shall dwell,
 And that assurèd joyance whereof no tongue may tell?
 So fares the feast in glory till thin the night doth grow,
 And joy hath wearied the people, and to rest and sleep they go:
 Then dight is the fateful bride-bed, and the Norns will hinder nought
 That the feet of the Niblung Maiden to the chamber of Kings be brought,
 And the troth is pledged and wedded, and the Norns cast nought before
 The feet of Sigurd the Volsung and the bridal chamber-door.
 All hushed was the house of the Niblungs, and they two were left alone,
 And kind as a man made happy was the golden Sigurd grown,
 As there in the arms of the mighty he clasped the Niblung Maid;
 But her spirit fainted within her, and her very soul was afraid,
 And her mouth was empty of words when their lips were sundered a space,
 And in awe and utter wonder she gazed upon his face;
 As one who hath prayed for a God in the dwelling of man to abide,
 And he comes, and the face unfashioned his ruth and his mercy must hide.
 She trembled and wept before him, till at last amidst her tears
 The joy and the hope of women fell on her unawares,
 And she sought the hands that had held her, and the face that her face had blessed,
 And the bosom of Sigurd the Mighty, the hope of her earthly rest.

Then he spake as she hearkened and wondered: "With the Kings of men I rode,
 And none but the men of the war-fain our coming swords abode:
 O, dear was the day of the riding, and the hope of the clashing swords!
 O, dear were the deeds of battle, and the fall of Odin's lords,
 When I met the overcomers, and beheld them overcome,
 When we rent the spoil from the spoilers, and led the chasers home!
 O, sweet was the day of the summer when we won the ancient towns,
 And we stood in the golden bowers and took and gave the crowns!
 And sweet were the suppliant faces, and the gifts and the grace we gave,
 And the life and the wealth un hoped for, and the hope to heal and save:
 And sweet was the praise of the Niblungs, and dear was the song that arose
 O'er the deed assured, accomplished, and the death of the people's foes!
 O joyful deeds of the mighty! O wondrous life of a King!
 Unto thee alone will I tell it, and his fond imagining,
 That but few of the people wot of, as he sits with face unmoved
 In the place where kings have perished, in the seat of kings beloved!"

His kind arms clung about her, and her face to his face he drew;
 "The life of the kings have I conquered, but this is strange and new;
 And from out the heart of the striving a lovelier thing is born,
 And the love of my love is sweeter and these hours before the morn."

Again she trembled before him and knew not what she feared,
 And her heart alone, unhidden, deemed her love too greatly dared;
 But the very body of Sigurd, the wonder of all men,
 Cast cherishing arms about her, and kissed her mouth again,
 And in love her whole heart melted, and all thought passed away,
 Save the thought of joy's fulfilment and the hours before the day;
 She murmured words of loving as his kind lips cherished her breast,
 And the world waxed nought but lovely and a place of infinite rest.

But it was long thereafter ere the sun rose o'er their love,
 And lit the world of autumn and the pale sky hung above;
 And it stirred the Gods in the heavens, and the Kings of the Goths it stirred,
 Till the sound of the world awakening in their latter dreams they heard;
 And over the Burg of the Niblungs the day spread fair and fresh
 O'er the hopes of the ancient people and those twain become one flesh.

Sigurd rideth with the Niblungs, and wooeth Brynhild for King Gunnar.

Now it fell on a day of the spring-tide that followed on these things,
 That Sigurd fares to the meadows with Gunnar and Hogni the Kings;
 For afar is Guttorm the youngest, and he sails the Eastern Seas,
 And fares with war-shield hoisted to win him fame's increase.
 So come the Kings to the Doom-ring, and the people's Hallowed Field,
 And no dwelling of man is anigh it, and no acre forced to yield;
 There stay those Kings of the people alone in weed of war,
 And they cut a strip of the greensward on the meadow's daisied floor,
 And loosen it clean in the midst, while its ends in the earth abide;
 Then they heave its midmost aloft, and set on either side
 An ancient spear of battle writ round with words of worth;
 And these are the posts of the door, whose threshold is of the earth
 And the skin of the earth is its lintel: but with war-glaives gleaming bare
 The Niblung Kings and Sigurd beneath the earth-yoke fare;
 Then each an arm-vein openeth, and their blended blood falls down
 On Earth the fruitful Mother where they rent her turfy gown:
 And then, when the blood of the Volsungs hath run with the Niblung blood,
 They kneel with their hands upon it and swear the brotherhood:
 Each man at his brother's bidding to come with the blade in his hand,
 Though the fire and the flood should sunder, and the very Gods withstand:
 Each man to love and cherish his brother's hope and will;
 Each man to avenge his brother when the Norns his fate fulfill:
 And now are they foster-brethren, and in such wise have they sworn
 As the God-born Goths of aforetime, when the world was newly born.
 But among the folk of the Niblungs goes forth the tale of the same,
 And men deem the tidings a glory and the garland of their fame.
 So is Sigurd yet with the Niblungs, and he loveth Gudrun his wife,
 And wendeth afield with the brethren to the days of the dooming of life;
 And nought his glory waneth, nor falleth the flood of praise:
 To every man he hearkeneth, nor gainsayeth any grace,
 And glad is the poor in the Doom-ring when he seeth his face mid the Kings,
 For the tangle straighteneth before him, and the maze of crookèd things.
 But the smile is departed from him, and the laugh of Sigurd the young,
 And of few words now is he waxen, and his songs are seldom sung.
 Howbeit of all the sad-faced was Sigurd loved the best;
 And men say: Is the king's heart mighty beyond all hope of rest?
 Lo, how he beareth the people! how heavy their woes are grown!
 So oft were a God mid the Goth-folk, if he dwelt in the world alone.
 Now Giuki the King of the Niblungs must change his life at the last,
 And they lay him down in the mountains and a great mound over him cast:
 For thus had he said in his life-days: "When my hand from the people shall fade,
 Up there on the side of the mountains shall the King of the Niblungs be laid,
 Whence one seeth the plain of the tillage and the fields where man-folk go;
 Then whiles in the dawn's awakening, when the day-wind riseth to blow,
 Shall I see the war-gates opening, and the joy of my shielded men

As they look to the field of the dooming; and whiles in the even again
 Shall I see the spoil come homeward, and the host of the Niblungs pour
 Through the gates that the Dwarf-folk builded and the well-belovèd door.“

So there lieth Giuki the King, mid steel and the glimmer of gold,
 As the sound of the feastful Niblungs round his misty house is rolled:
 But Gunnar is King of the people, and the chief of the Niblung land;
 A man beloved for his mercy, and his might and his open hand;
 A glorious king in the battle, a hearkener at the doom,
 A singer to sing the sun up from the heart of the midnight gloom.

On a day sit the Kings in the high-seat when Grimhild saith to her son:
 ”O Gunnar, King belovèd, a fair life hast thou won;
 On the flood, in the field hast thou wrought, and hung the chambers with gold;
 Far abroad mid many a people are the tidings of thee told:
 Now do a deed for thy mother and the hallowed Niblung hearth,
 Lest the house of the mighty perish, and our tale grow wan with dearth.
 If thou do the deed that I bid thee, and wed a wife of the Kings,
 No less shalt thou cleave the war-helms and scatter the ruddy rings.“

He said: ”Meseemeth, mother, thou speaketh not in haste,
 But hast sought and found beforehand, lest thy fair words fall to waste.“

She said: ”Thou sayest the sooth; I have found the thing I sought:
 A Maid for thee is shapen, and a Queen for thee is wrought:
 In the waste land hard by Lyndale a marvellous hall is built,
 With its roof of the red gold beaten, and its wall-stones over-gilt:
 Afar o’er the heath men see it, but no man draweth nigher,
 For the garth that goeth about it is nought but the roaring fire,
 A white wall waving aloft; and no window nor wicket is there,
 Whereby the shielded earl-folk or the sons of the merchants may fare:
 But few things from me are hidden, and I know in that hall of gold
 Sits Brynhild, white as a wild-swan where the foamless seas are rolled;
 And the daughter of Kings of the world, and the sister of Queens is she,
 And wise, and Odin’s Chooser, and the Breath of Victory:
 But for this cause sitteth she thus in the ring of the Wavering Flame,
 That no son of the Kings will she wed save the mightiest master of fame,
 And the man who knoweth not fear, and the man foredoomed of fate
 To ride through her Wavering Fire to the door of her golden gate:
 And for him she sitteth and waiteth, and him shall she cherish and love,
 Though the Kings of the world should withstand it, and the Gods that sit above.
 Speak thou, O mighty Gunnar!—nay rather, Sigurd my son,
 Say who but the lord of the Niblungs should wed with this glorious one?“

Long Sigurd gazeth upon her, and slow he sayeth again:
 ”I know thy will, my mother; of all the sons of men,
 Of all the Kings unwedded, and the kindred of the great,
 It is meet that my brother Gunnar should ride to her golden gate.“

Then laughed Gunnar and answered: ”May a king of the people fear?
 May a king of the harp and the hall-glee hold such a maid but dear?
 Yet nought have I and my kindred to do with fateful deeds;
 Lo, how the fair earth bloometh, and the field fulfilleth our needs,
 And our swords rust not in our scabbards, and our steeds bide not in the stall,
 And oft are the shields of the Niblungs drawn clanking down from the wall;
 And I sit by my brother Sigurd, and no ill there is in our life,
 And the harp and the sword is beside me, and I joy in the peace and the strife.
 So I live, till at last in the sword-play midst the uttermost longing of fame
 I shall change my life and be merry, and leave no hated name.

Yet nevertheless, my mother, since the word has thus gone forth,
And I wot of thy great desire, I will reach at this garland of worth;
And I bid you, Kings and Brethren, with the wooer of Queens to ride,
That ye tell of the thing hereafter, and the deeds that shall betide.“

”It were well, O Son,“ said Grimhild, ”in such fellowship to fare;
But not today nor tomorrow; the hearts of the Gods would I wear,
And know of the will of the Norns; for a mighty matter is this,
And a deed all lands shall tell of, and the hope of the Niblung bliss.“

So apart for long dwelt Grimhild, and mingled the might of the earth
With the deeds of the chilly sea, and the heart of the cloudland’s dearth;
And all these with the wine she mingled, and sore guile was set therein,
Blindness, and strong compelling for such as dared to win:
And she gave the drink to her sons; and withal unto Gunnar she spake,
And told him tales of the King-folk, and smote desire awake;
Till many a time he bethinks him of the Maiden sitting alone,
And the Queen that was shapen for him; till a dream of the night is she grown,
And a tale of the day’s desire, and the crown of all his praise:
And the net of the Norns was about him, and the snare was spread in his ways,
And his mother’s will was spurring adown the way they would;
For she was the wise of women and the framer of evil and good.

In the May-morn riseth Gunnar with fair face and gleaming eyes,
And he calleth on Sigurd his brother, and he calleth on Hogni the wise:
”Today shall we fare to the wooing, for so doth our mother bid;
We shall go to gaze on marvels, and things from the King-folk hid.“

So they do on the best of their war-gear, and their steeds are dight for the road,
And forth to the sun neigheth Greyfell as he neighed ’neath the Golden Load:
But or ever they leap to the saddle, while yet in the door they stand,
Thereto cometh Grimhild the wise-wife, and on each head layeth her hand,
As she saith: ”Be mighty and wise, as the kings that came before!
For they knew of the ways of the Gods, and the craft of the Gods they bore:
And they knew how the shapes of man-folk are the very images
Of the hearts that abide within them, and they knew of the shaping of these.
Be wise and mighty, O Kings, and look in mine heart and behold
The craft that prevaieth o’er semblance, and the treasured wisdom of old!
I hallow you thus for the day, and I hallow you thus for the night,
And I hallow you thus for the dawning with my fathers’ hidden might.
Go now, for ye bear my will while I sit in the hall and spin;
And tonight shall be the weaving, and tomorn the web shall ye win.“

So they leap to the saddles aloft, and they ride and speak no word,
But the hills and the dales are awakened by the clink of the sheathed sword:
None looks in the face of the other, but the earth and the heavens gaze,
And behold those kings of battle ride down the dusty ways.

So they come to the Waste of Lymdale when the afternoon is begun,
And afar they see the flame-blink on the grey sky under the sun:
And they spur and speak no word, and no man to his fellow will turn;
But they see the hills draw upward and the earth beginning to burn:
And they ride, and the eve is coming, and the sun hangs low o’er the earth,
And the red flame roars up to it from the midst of the desert’s dearth.
None turns or speaks to his brother, but the Wrath gleams bare and red,
And blood-red is the Helm of Aweing on the golden Sigurd’s head,
And bare is the blade of Gunnar, and the first of the three he rides,
And the wavering wall is before him and the golden sun it hides.

Then the heart of a king's son failed not, but he tossed his sword on high
 And laughed as he spurred for the fire, and cried the Niblung cry;
 But the mare's son saw and imagined, and the battle-eager steed,
 That so oft had pierced the spear-hedge and never failed at need,
 Shrank back, and shrieked in his terror, and spite of spur and rein
 Fled fast as the foals unbitted on Odin's pasturing plain;
 Wide then he wheeled with Gunnar, but with hand and knee he dealt,
 And the voice of a lord belovèd, till the steed his master felt,
 And bore him back to the brethren; by Greyfell Sigurd stood,
 And stared at the heart of the fire, and his helm was red as blood;
 But Hogni sat in his saddle, and watched the flames up-roll;
 And he said: "Thy steed has failed thee that was once the noblest foal
 In the pastures of King Giuki; but since thine heart fails not,
 And thou wouldst not get thee backward and say, The fire was hot,
 And the voices pent within it were singing nought but death,
 Let Sigurd lend thee his steed that wore the Glittering Heath,
 And carried the Bed of the Serpent, and the ancient ruddy rings.
 So perchance may the mocks be lesser when men tell of the Niblung Kings."

Then Sigurd looked on the twain, and he saw their swart hair wave
 In the wind of the waste and the flame-blast, and no answer awhile he gave.
 But at last he spake: "O brother, on Greyfell shalt thou ride,
 And do on the Helm of Aweing and gird the Wrath to thy side,
 And cover thy breast with the war-coat that is throughly woven of gold,
 That hath not its like in the heavens nor has earth of its fellow told:
 For this is the raiment of Kings when they ride the Flickering Fire,
 And so sink the flames before them and the might of their desire."

Then Hogni laughed in his heart, and he said: "This changing were well
 If so might the deed be accomplished; but perchance there is more to tell:
 Thou shalt take the war-steed, Gunnar, and enough or nought it shall be:
 But the coal-blue gear of the Niblungs the golden hall shall see."

Then Sigurd looked on the speaker, as one who would answer again,
 But his words died out on the waste and the fire-blast made them vain.
 Then he casteth the reins to his brother, and Gunnar praiseth his gift,
 And springeth aloft to the saddle as the fair sun fails from the lift;
 And Sigurd looks on the burden that Greyfell doth uprear,
 The huge king towering upward in the dusky Niblung gear:
 There sits the eager Gunnar, and his heart desires the deed,
 And of nought he reckoneth and thinketh, but a fame-stirred warrior's need;
 But Greyfell trembleth nothing and nought of the fire doth reck:
 Then the spurs in his flank are smitten, and the reins lie loose on his neck,
 And the sharp cry springeth from Gunnar—no handbreadth stirred the beast;
 The dusk drew on and over and the light of the fire increased,
 And still as a shard on the mountain in the sandy dale alone
 Was the shape of the cloudy Greyfell, nor moved he more than the stone;
 But right through the heart of the fire for ever Sigurd stared,
 As he stood in the gold red-litten with the Wrath's thin edges bared.

No word for a while spake any, till Gunnar leaped to the earth,
 And the anger wrought within him, and the fierce words came to birth:
 "Who mocketh the King of the Niblungs in the desert land forlorn?
 Is it thou, O Sigurd the Stranger? is it thou, O younger-born?
 Dost thou laugh in the hall, O Mother? dost thou spin, and laugh at the tale
 That has drawn thy son and thine eldest to the sword and the blaze of the bale?
 Or thou, O God of the Goths, wilt thou hide and laugh thy fill,
 While the hands of the fosterbrethren the blood of brothers spill?"

But the awful voice of Sigurd across the wild went forth:
"How changed are the words of Gunnar! where wend his ways of worth?
I mock thee not in the desert, as I mocked thee not in the mead,
When I swore beneath the turf-yoke to help thy fondest need:
Nay, strengthen thine heart for the work, for the gift that thy manhood awaits;
For I give thee a gift, O Niblung, that shall overload the Fates,
And how may a King sustain it? but forbear with the dark to strive;
For thy mother spinneth and worketh, and her craft is awake and alive."
Then Hogni spake from the saddle: "The time, and the time is come
To gather the might of our mother, and of her that spinneth at home.
Forbear all words, O Gunnar, and anigh to Sigurd stand,
And face to face behold him, and take his hand in thine hand:
Then be thy will as his will, that his heart may mingle with thine,
And the love that he sware 'neath the earth-yoke with thine hope may intertwine."
Then the wrath from the Niblung slippeth and the shame that anger hath bred,
And the heavy wings of the dreamtide flit over Gunnar's head:
But he doth by his brother's bidding, and Sigurd's hand he takes,
And he looks in the eyes of the Volsung, though scarce in the desert he wakes.
There Hogni sits in the saddle aloof from the King's desire,
And little his lips are moving, as he stares on the rolling fire,
And mutters the spells of his mother, and the words she bade him say:
But the craft of the kings of aforetime on those Kings of the battle lay;
Dark night was spread behind them, and the fire flared up before,
And unheard was the wind of the wasteland mid the white flame's wavering roar.
Long Sigurd gazeth on Gunnar, till he sees, as through a cloud,
The long black locks of the Niblung, and the King's face set and proud:
Then the face is alone on the dark, and the dusky Niblung mail
Is nought but the night before him: then whiles will the visage fail,
And grow again as he gazeth, black hair and gleaming eyes,
And fade again into nothing, as for more of vision he tries:
Then all is nought but the night, yea the waste of an emptier thing,
And the fire-wall Sigurd forgetteth, nor feeleth the hand of the King:
Nay, what is it now he remembereth? it is nought that aforetime he knew,
And no world is there left him to live in, and no deed to rejoice in or rue;
But frail and alone he fareth, and as one in the sphere-stream's drift,
By the starless empty places that lie beyond the lift:
Then at last is he stayed in his drifting, and he saith, It is blind and dark;
Yet he feeleth the earth at his feet, and there cometh a change and a spark,
And away in an instant of time is the mirk of the dreamland rolled,
And there is the fire-lit midnight, and before him an image of gold,
A man in the raiment of Gods, nor fashioned worsen than they:
Full sad he gazeth on Sigurd from the great wide eyes and grey;
And the Helm that Aweth the people is set on the golden hair,
And the Mail of Gold enwraps him, and the Wrath in his hand is bare.
Then Sigurd looks on his arm and his hand in his brother's hand,
And thereon is the dark grey mail-gear well forged in the southern land;
Then he looks on the sword that he beareth, and, lo, the eager blade
That leaps in the hand of Gunnar when the kings are waxen afraid;
And he turns his face o'er his shoulder, and the raven-locks hang down
From the dark-blue helm of the Dwarf-folk, and the rings of the Niblung crown.
Then a red flush riseth against him in the face ne'er seen before,
Save dimly in the mirror or the burnished targe of war,
And the foster-brethren sunder, and the clasped hands fall apart;
But a change cometh over Sigurd, and the fierce pride leaps in his heart;

He knoweth the soul of Gunnar, and the shaping of his mind;
 He seeketh the words of Sigurd, and Gunnar's voice doth he find,
 As he cries: "I know thy bidding; let the world be lief or loth,
 The child is unborn that shall hearken how Sigurd rued his oath!
 Well fare thou brother Gunnar! what deed shall I do this eve
 That I shall never repent of, that thine heart shall never grieve?
 What deed shall I do this even that none else may bring to the birth,
 Nay, not the King of the Niblungs, and the lord of the best of the earth?"

The flames rolled up to the heavens, and the stars behind were bright,
 Dark Hogni sat on his war-steed, and stared out into the night,
 And there stood Gunnar the King in Sigurd's semblance wrapped,
 —As Sigurd walking in slumber, for in Grimhild's guile was he lapped,
 That his heart forgot his glory, and the ways of Odin's lords,
 And the thought was frozen within him, and the might of spoken words.

But Sigurd leapeth on Greyfell, and the sword in his hand is bare,
 And the gold spurs flame on his heels, and the fire-blast lifteth his hair;
 Forth Greyfell bounds rejoicing, and they see the grey wax red,
 As unheard the war-gear clasheth, and the flames meet over his head,
 Yet a while they see him riding, as through the rye men ride,
 When the word goes forth in the summer of the kings by the ocean-side;
 But the fires were slaked before him and the wild-fire burned no more
 Than the ford of the summer waters when the rainy time is o'er.

Not once turned Sigurd aback, nor looked o'er the ashy ring,
 To the midnight wilderness drear and the spell-drenched Niblung King:
 But he stayed and looked before him, and lo, a house high-built
 With its roof of the red gold beaten, and its wall-stones over-gilt:
 So he leapt adown from Greyfell, and came to that fair abode,
 And dark in the gear of the Niblungs through the gleaming door he strode:
 All light within was that dwelling, and a marvellous hall it was,
 But of gold were its hangings woven, and its pillars gleaming as glass,
 And Sigurd said in his heart, it was wrought erewhile for a God:
 But he looked athwart and endlong as alone its floor he trod,
 And lo, on the height of the dais is upreared a graven throne,
 And thereon a woman sitting in the golden place alone;
 Her face is fair and awful, and a gold crown girdeth her head;
 And a sword of the kings she beareth, and her sun-bright hair is shed
 O'er the laps of the snow-white linen that ripples adown to her feet:
 As a swan on the billow unbroken ere the firth and the ocean meet,
 On the dark-blue cloths she sitteth, in the height of the golden place,
 Nor breaketh the hush of the hall, though her eyes be set on his face.

Now he sees this is even the woman of whom the tale hath been told,
 E'en she that was wrought for the Niblungs, the bride ordained from of old,
 And hushed in the hall he standeth, and a long while looks in her eyes,
 And the word he hath shapen for Gunnar to his lips may never arise.

The man in Gunnar's semblance looked long and knew no deed;
 And she looked, and her eyes were dreadful, and none would help her need.
 Then the image of Gunnar trembled, and the flesh of the War-King shrank;
 For he heard her voice on the silence, and his heart of her anguish drank:

"King, King, who art thou that comest, thou lord of the cloudy gear?
 What deed for the weary-hearted shall thy strange hands fashion here?"

The speech of her lips pierced through him like the point of the bitter sword,
 And he deemed that death were better than another spoken word:
 But he clencheth his hand on the war-blade, and setteth his face as the brass,

And the voice of his brother Gunnar from out his lips doth pass:
"When thou lookest on me, O Goddess, thou seest Gunnar the King,
The King and the lord of the Niblungs, and the chief of their warfaring.
But art thou indeed that Brynhild of whom is the rumour and fame,
That she bideth the coming of kings to ride her Wavering Flame,
Lest she wed the little-hearted, and the world grow evil and vile?
For if thou be none other I will speak again in a while."

She said: "Art thou Gunnar the Stranger? O art thou the man that I see?
Yea, verily I am Brynhild: what other is like unto me?
O men of the Earth behold me! hast thou seen, O labouring Earth,
Such sorrow as my sorrow, or such evil as my birth?"

Then spake the Wildfire's Trampler that Gunnar's image bore:
"O Brynhild, mighty of women, be thou glorious evermore!
Thou seest Gunnar the Niblung, as he sits mid the Niblung lords,
And rides with the gods of battle in the fore-front of the swords.
Now therefore awaken to life! for this eve have I ridden thy Fire,
When but few of the kings would outface it, to fulfil thine heart's desire.
And such love is the love of the kings, and such token have women to know
That they wed with God's beloved, and that fair from their bed shall outgrow
The stem of the world's desire, and the tree that shall not be abased,
Till the day of the uttermost trial when the war-shield of Odin is raised.
So my word is the word of wooing, and I bid thee remember thine oath,
That here in this hall fair-built we twain may plight the troth;
That here in the hall of thy waiting thou be made a wedded wife,
And be called the Queen of the Niblungs, and awaken unto life."

Hard rang his voice in the hall, and a while she spake no word,
And there stood the Image of Gunnar, and leaned on his bright blue sword:
But at last she cried from the high-seat: "If I yet am alive and awake,
I know no words for the speaking, nor what answer I may make."

She ceased and he answered nothing; and a hush on the hall there lay,
And the moon slipped over the windows as he clomb the heavenly way;
And no whit stirred the raiment of Brynhild: till she hearkened the Wooer's voice,
As he said: "Thou art none of the women that swear and forswear and rejoice,
Forgetting the sorrow of kings and the Gods and the labouring earth.
Thou shalt wed with King Gunnar the Niblung and increase his worth with thy worth."

And again was there silence a while, and the War-King leaned on his sword
In the shape of his foster-brother; then Brynhild took up the word:
"Hail Gunnar, King of the Niblungs! tonight shalt thou lie by my side,
For thou art the Gods' beloved, and for thee was I shapen a bride:
For thee, for the King, have I waited, and the waiting now is done;
I shall bear Earth's kings on my bosom and nourish the Niblung's son.
Though women swear and forswear, and are glad no less in their life,
Tonight shall I wed with the King-folk and be called King Gunnar's wife.
Come Gunnar, Lord of the Niblungs, and sit in my fathers' seat!
For for thee alone was it shapen, and the deed is due and meet."

Up she rose exceeding glorious, and it was as when in May
The blossomed hawthorn stirreth with the dawning-wind of day;
But the Wooer moved to meet her, and amid the golden place
They met, and their garments mingled and face was close to face;
And they turned again to the high-seat, and their very right hands met,
And King Gunnar's bodily semblance beside her Brynhild set.

But over his knees and the mail-rings the high King laid his sword,
And looked in the face of Brynhild and swore King Gunnar's word:

He swore on the hand of Brynhild to be true to his wedded wife,
And before all things to love her till all folk should praise her life.
Unmoved did Brynhild hearken, and in steady voice she swore
To be true to Gunnar the Niblung while her life-days should endure;
So she swore on the hand of the Wooer: and they two were all alone,
And they sat a while in the high-seat when the wedding-troth was done,
But no while looked each on the other, and hand fell down from hand,
And no speech there was betwixt them that their hearts might understand.

At last spake the all-wise Brynhild: "Now night is beginning to fade,
Fair-hung is the chamber of Kings, and the bridal bed is arrayed."

He rose and looked upon her: as the moon at her utmost height,
So pale was the visage of Brynhild, and her eyes as cold and bright:
Yet he stayed, nor stirred from the high-seat, but strove with the words for a space,
Till she took the hand of the King and led him down from his place,
And forth from the hall she led him to the chamber wrought for her love;
The fairest chamber of earth, gold-wrought below and above,
And hung were the walls fair-built with the Gods and the kings of the earth
And the deeds that were done aforetime, and the coming deeds of worth.
There they went in one bed together; but the foster-brother laid
'Twixt him and the body of Brynhild his bright blue battle-blade,
And she looked and heeded it nothing; but e'en as the dead folk lie,
With folded hands she lay there, and let the night go by:
And as still lay that Image of Gunnar as the dead of life forlorn,
And hand on hand he folded as he waited for the morn.

So oft in the moonlit minster your fathers may ye see
By the side of the ancient mothers await the day to be.
Thus they lay as brother by sister—and e'en such had they been to behold,
Had he borne the Volsung's semblance and the shape she knew of old.

Night hushed as the moon fell downward, and there came the leaden sleep
And weighed down the head of the War-King, that he lay in slumber deep,
And forgot today and tomorrow, and forgotten yesterday;
Till he woke in the dawn and the daylight, and the sun on the gold floor lay,
And Brynhild wakened beside him, and she lay with folded hands
By the edges forged of Regin and the wonder of the lands,
The Light that had lain in the Branstock, the hope of the Volsung Tree,
The Sunderer, the Deliverer, the torch of days to be:

Then he strove to remember the night and what deeds had come to pass,
And what deeds he should do hereafter, and what manner of man he was;
For there in the golden chamber lay the dark unwonted gear,
And beside his cheek on the pillow were long locks of the raven hair:
But at last he remembered the even and the deed he came to do,
And he turned and spake to Brynhild as he rose from the bolster blue:

"I give thee thanks, fair woman, for the wedding-troth fulfilled;
I have come where the Norns have led me, and done as the high Gods willed:
But now give we the gifts of the morning, for I needs must depart to my men
And look on the Niblung children, and rule o'er the people again.
But I thank thee well for thy greeting, and thy glory that I have seen,
For but little thereto are those tidings that folk have told of the Queen.
Henceforth with the Niblung people anew beginneth thy life,
And fair days of peace await thee, and fair days of glorious strife.
And my heart shall be grieved at thy grief, and be glad of thy well-doing,
And all men shall say thou hast wedded a true heart and a king."

So spake he in semblance of Gunnar, and from off his hand he drew
A ring of the spoils of the Southland, a marvel seen but of few,

And he set the ring on her finger, and she turned to her lord and spake:
"I thank thee, King, for thy goodwill, and thy pledge of love I take.
Depart with my troth to thy people: but ere full ten days are o'er
I shall come to the Sons of the Niblungs, and then shall we part no more
Till the day of the change of our life-days, when Odin and Freyia shall call.
Lo, here, my gift of the morning! 'twas my dearest treasure of all;
But thou art become its master, and for thee was it fore-ordained,
Since thou art the man of mine oath and the best that the earth hath gained."

And lo, 'twas the Grief of Andvari, and the lack that made him loth,
The last of the God-folk's ransom, the Ring of Hindfell's oath;
Now on Sigurd's hand it shineth, and long he looketh thereon,
But it gave him back no memories of the days that were bygone.
Then in most exceeding sorrow rose Sigurd from the bed,
And again lay Brynhild silent as an image of the dead.
Then the King did on his war-gear and girt his sword to his side,
And was e'en as an image of Gunnar when the Niblungs dight them to ride.
And she on the bed of the bridal, remembering hope that was,
Lay still, and hearkened his footsteps from the echoing chamber pass.
So forth from the hall goes the Wooer, and slow and slow he goes,
As a conquered king from his city fares forth to meet his foes;
And he taketh the reins of Greyfell, nor yet will back him there,
But afoot through the cold slaked ashes of yester-eve doth fare,
With his eyes cast down to the earth; till he heareth the wind, and a cry,
And raiseth a face brow-knitted and beholdeth men anigh,
And beholdeth Hogni the King set grey on his coal-black steed,
And beholdeth the image of Sigurd, the King in the golden weed:
Then he stayeth and stareth astonished and setteth his hand to his sword;
Till Hogni cries from his saddle, and his word is a kindly word:

"Hail, brother, and King of the people! hail, helper of my kin!
Again from the death and the trouble great gifts hast thou set thee to win
For thy friends and the Niblung children, and hast crowned thine earthly fame,
And increased thine exceeding glory and the sound of thy lovèd name."

Nought Sigurd spake in answer but looked straight forth with a frown,
And stretched out his hand to Gunnar, as one that claimeth his own.
Then no word speaketh Gunnar, but taketh his hand in his hand,
And they look in the eyes of each other, and a while in the desert they stand
Till the might of Grimhild prevaieth, and the twain are as yester-morn;
But sad was the golden Sigurd, though his eyes knew nought of scorn:
And he spake:

"It is finished, O Gunnar! and I will that our brotherhood
May endure through the good and the evil as it sprang in the days of the good;
But I bid thee look to the ending, that the deed I did yest'reve
Bear nought for me to repent of, for thine heart of hearts to grieve.
Thou art troth-plight, O King of the Niblungs, to Brynhild Queen of the earth,
She hath sworn thine heart to cherish and increase thy worth with her worth:
She shall come to the house of Gunnar ere ten days are past and o'er;
And thenceforth the life of Brynhild shall part from thy life no more,
Till the doom of our kind shall speed you, and Odin and Freyia shall call,
And ye bide the Day of the Battle, and the uttermost changing of all."

The praise and thanks they gave him! the words of love they spake!
The tale that the world should hear of, deeds done for Sigurd's sake!
They were lovely might you hear them: but they lack; for in very deed
Their sound was clean forgotten in the day of Sigurd's need.

But as yet are those King-folk lovely, and no guile of heart they know,
 And, in troth and love rejoicing, by Sigurd's side they go:
 O'er heath and holt they hie them, o'er hill and dale they ride,
 Till they come to the Burg of the Niblungs and the war-gate of their pride;
 And there is Grimhild the wise-wife, and she sits and spins in the hall.

"Rejoice, O mother," saith Gunnar, "for thy guest hath holpen all
 And this eve shall thy sons be merry: but ere ten days are o'er
 Here cometh the Maid, and the Queen, the Wise, and the Chooser of war;
 So wrought is the will of the Niblungs and their blossoming boughs increase,
 And joyous strife shall we dwell in, and merry days of peace."

So that night in the hall of the ancient they hold high-tide again,
 And the Gods on the Southland hangings smile out full fair and fain,
 And the song goes up of Sigurd, and the praise of his fame fulfilled,
 But his speech in the dead sleep lieth, and the words of his wisdom are chilled:
 And men say, the King is careful, for he thinks of the people's weal,
 And his heart is afraid for our trouble, lest the Gods our joyance steal.

But that night, when the feast was over, to Gudrun Sigurd came,
 And she noted the ring on his finger, and she knew it was nowise the same
 As the ring he was wont to carry; so she bade him tell thereof:
 Then he turned unto her kindly, and his words were words of love;
 Nor his life nor his death he heeded, but told her last night's tale:
 Yea he drew forth the sword for his slaying, and whetted the edges of bale;
 For he took that Gold of Andvari, that Curse of the uttermost land,
 And he spake as a king that loveth, and set it on her hand;
 But her heart was exceeding joyous, as he kissed her sweet and soft,
 And bade her bear it for ever, that she might remember him oft
 When his hand from the world was departed and he sat in Odin's home.

But no one of his words she forgot when the latter days were come,
 When the earth was hard for her footsteps, and the heavens were darkling above
 And but e'en as a tale that is told were waxen the years of her love,
 Yea thereof, from the Gold of Andvari, the sparks of the waters wan,
 Sprang a flame of bitter trouble, and the death of many a man,
 And the quenching of the kindreds, and the blood of the broken troth,
 And the Grievous Need of the Niblungs and the Sorrow of Odin the Goth.

How Brynhild was wedded to Gunnar the Niblung.

So wear the ten days over, and the morrow-morn is come,
 And the light-foot expectation flits through the Niblung home,
 And the girded hope is ready, and all people are astir,
 When the voice of the keen-eyed watchman from the topmost tower they hear:
 "Look forth from the Burg, O Niblungs, and the war-gate of renown!
 For the wind is up in the morning, and the may-blooms fall adown,
 And the sun on the earth is shining, and the clouds are small and high,
 And here is a goodly people and an army drawing anigh."

Then horsed are the sons of the earl-folk, and their robes are glittering-gay,
 And they ride o'er the bridge of the river adown the dusty way,
 Till they come on a lovely people, and the maids of war they meet,
 Whose cloaks are blue and broidered, and their girded linen sweet;
 And they ride on the roan and the grey, and the dapple-grey and the red,
 And many a bloom of the may-tide on their crispy locks is shed:
 Fair, young are the sons of the earl-folk, and they laugh for love and glee,
 As the lovely-wristed maidens on the summer ways they see.

But lo, mid the sweet-faced fellows there cometh a golden wain,
Like the wain of the sea be-shielded with the signs of the war-god's gain:
Snow-white are its harnessed yoke-beasts, and its bench-cloths are of blue,
Inwrought with the written wonders that ancient women knew;
But nought therein there sitteth save a crownèd queen alone,
Swan-white on the dark-blue bench-cloths and the carven ivory throne;
Abashed are sons of the earl-folk of their laughter and their glee,
When the glory of Queen Brynhild on the summer ways they see.

But they hear the voice of the woman, and her speech is soft and kind:
"Are ye the sons of the Niblungs, and the folk I came to find,
O young men fair and lovely? So may your days be long,
And grow in gain and glory, and fail of grief and wrong!"
Then they hailed her sweet and goodly, and back again they rode
By the bridge o'er the rushing river to the gate of their abode;
And high aloft, half-hearkened, rang the joyance of the horn,
And the cry of the Ancient People from their walls of war was borne
O'er the tilth of the plain, and the meadows, and the sheep-fed slopes that lead
From the God-built wall of the mountains to the blossoms of the mead.

Then up in the wain stood Brynhild, and her voice was sweet as she said:
"Is this the house of Gunnar, and the man I swore to wed?"

But she hearkened the cry from the gateway and the hollow of the door:
"Yea this is the dwelling of Gunnar, and the house of the God of War:
There is none of the world so mighty, be he outland King or Goth,
Save Sigurd the mighty Volsung and the brother of his troth."

Then spake Brynhild and said: "Lo, a house of ancient Kings,
Wrought for great deeds' fulfilment, and the birth of noble things!
Be the bloom of the earth upon it, and the hope of the heavens above!
May peace and joy abide there, and the full content of love!
And when our days are done with, and we lie alow in rest,
May its lords returning homeward still deem they see the best!"

She spake with voice unfaltering, and the golden wain moved on,
And all men deemed who heard her that great gifts their home had won.

So she passed through the dusk of the doorway, and the cave of the war-fair folk,
Wherein the echoing horse-hoofs as the sound of swords awoke,
And the whispering wind of the may-tide from the cloudy wall smote back,
And cried in the crown of the roof-arch of battle and the wrack;
And the voice of maidens sounded as kings' cries in the day of the wrath,
When the flame is on the threshold and the war-shields strew the path.

So fair in the sun of the forecourt doth Brynhild's wain shine bright,
And the huge hall riseth before her, and the ernes cry out from its height,
And there by the door of the Niblungs she sees huge warriors stand,
Dark-clad, by the shoulders greater than the best of any land,
And she knoweth the chiefs of the Niblungs, the dreaded dukes of war:
But one in cloudy raiment stands a very midst the door,
And ruddy and bright is his visage, and his black locks wave in the wind,
And she knoweth the King of the Niblungs and the man she came to find:
Then nought she lingered nor loitered, but stepped to the earth adown
With right-hand reached to the War-God, the wearer of the crown;
And she said:
"I behold thee, Gunnar, the King of War that rode
Through the waves of the Flickering Fire to the door of mine abode,
To lie by my side in the even, and waken in the morn;
And for this I needs must deem thee the best of all men born,

The highest-hearted, the greatest, the staunchest of thy love:
 And that such the world yet holdeth, my heart is fain thereof:
 And for thee I deem was I fashioned, and for thee the oath I swore
 In the days of my glory and wisdom, ere the days of youth were o'er.
 May the bloom of the earth be upon thee, and the hope of the heavens above,
 May the blessing of days be upon thee, and the full content of love!
 Mayst thou see our children's children, and the crownèd kin of kings!
 May no hope from thine eyes be hidden of the day of better things!
 May the fire ne'er stay thy glory, nor the ocean-flood thy fame!
 Through ages of all ages may the wide world praise thy name!
 Yea oft may the word be spoken when low we lie at rest,
 'It befell in the days of Gunnar, the happiest and the best!'
 All this may the high Gods give thee, and thereto a gift I give,
 The body of Queen Brynhild so long as both we live."

With unmoved face, unfaltering, the blessing-words she said,
 But the joy sprang up in Gunnar and increased his goodlihead,
 And he cast his arms about her and kissed her on the mouth,
 And he said:

"The gift is greater than all treasure of the south:
 As glad as my heart this moment, so glad may be thy life,
 And the world be never weary of the joy of Gunnar's wife!"

She spake no word, and smiled not, but she held his hand henceforth.
 And he said: "Now take the greetings of my men, the most of worth."

Then she turned her face to the war-dukes, and hearkened to their praise,
 And she spake in few words sweetly, and blessed their coming days.
 Then again spake Gunnar and said: "Lo, Hogni my brother is this;
 But Guttorm is far on the East-seas, and seeketh the warrior's bliss;
 A third there is of my brethren, and my house holds none so great;
 In the hall by the side of my sister thy face doth he await."

Then Brynhild turned unto Hogni, and he greeted her fair and well,
 And she prayed all blessings upon him, and a tale that the world should tell:
 Then again she spake unto Gunnar: "I had deemed ye had been but three
 Who sprang from the loins of Giuki; is this fourth akin unto thee,
 This hall-abider the mighty?"

He said: "He is nought of our blood.
 But the Gods have sent him to usward to work us measureless good:
 It is even Sigurd the Volsung, the best man ever born,
 The man that the Gods withstand not, my friend, and my brother sworn."

She heard the name, and she changed not, but her feet went forth as he led,
 And under the cloudy roof-tree Queen Brynhild bowed her head.
 Then, were there a man so ancient as had lived beyond his peers
 On the earth, that beareth all things, a twice-told tale of years,
 He had heard no sound so mighty as the shout that shook the wall
 When Brynhild's feet unhearkened first trod the Niblung hall.
 No whit the clamour stirred her; but her godlike eyes she raised
 And betwixt the hedge of the earl-folk on the golden high-seat gazed,
 And the man that sat by Gudrun: but e'en as the rainless cloud
 Ere the first of the tempest ariseth the latter sun doth shroud,
 And men look round and shudder, so Grimhild came between
 The silent golden Sigurd and the eyes of the mighty Queen,
 And again heard Brynhild greeting, and again she spake and said:

"O Mother of the Niblungs, such hap be on thine head,
 As thy love for me, the stranger, was past the pain of words!

Mayst thou see thy son's sons glorious in the meeting of the swords!
Mayst thou sleep and doubt thee nothing of the fortunes of thy race!
Mayst thou hear folk call yon high-seat the earth's most happy place!"

Then the Wise-wife hushed before her, and a little fell aside,
And nought from the eyes of Brynhild the high-seat now did hide;
And the face so long desired, unchanged from time ago,
In the house of the Cloudy People from the Niblung high-seat shone:
She stood with her hand in Gunnar's, and all about and around
Were the unfamiliar faces, and the folk that day had found;
But her heart ran back through the years, and yet her lips did move
With the words she spake on Hindfell, when they plighted troth of love.

Lo, Sigurd fair on the high-seat by the white-armed Gudrun's side,
In the midst of the Cloudy People, in the dwelling of their pride!
His face is exceeding glorious and awful to behold;
For of all his sorrow he knoweth and his hope smit dead and cold:
The will of the Norns is accomplished, and, lo, they wend on their ways,
And leave the mighty Sigurd to deal with the latter days:
The Gods look down from heaven, and the lonely King they see,
And sorrow over his sorrow, and rejoice in his majesty.
For the will of the Norns is accomplished, and outworn is Grimhild's spell,
And nought now shall blind or help him, and the tale shall be to tell:
He hath seen the face of Brynhild, and he knows why she hath come,
And that his is the hand that hath drawn her to the Cloudy People's home:
He knows of the net of the days, and the deeds that the Gods have bid,
And no whit of the sorrow that shall be from his wakened soul is hid:
And his glory his heart restraineth, and restraineth the hand of the strong
From the hope of the fools of desire and the wrong that amendeth wrong;
And he seeth the ways of the burden till the last of the uttermost end.
But for all the measureless anguish, and the woe that nought may amend,
His heart speeds back to Hindfell, and the dawn of the waking day;
And the hours betwixt are as nothing, and their deeds are fallen away
As he looks on the face of Brynhild; and nought is the Niblung folk,
But they two are again together, and he speaketh the words he spoke,
When he swore the love that endureth, and the truth that knoweth not change;
And Brynhild's face drew near him with eyes grown stern and strange.
—Lo, such is the high Gods' sorrow, and men know nought thereof,
Who cry out o'er their undoing, and wail o'er broken love.
Now she stands on the floor of the high-seat, and for e'en so little a space
As men may note delaying, she looketh on Sigurd's face,
Ere she saith:

"I have greeted many in the Niblungs' house today,
And for thee is the last of my greetings ere the feast shall wear away:
Hail, Sigurd, son of the Volsungs! hail, lord of Odin's storm!
Hail, rider of the wasteland and slayer of the Worm!
If aught thy soul shall desire while yet thou livest on earth,
I pray that thou mayst win it, nor forget its might and worth."

All grief, sharp scorn, sore longing, stark death in her voice he knew,
But gone forth is the doom of the Norns, and what shall he answer thereto,
While the death that amendeth lingers? and they twain shall dwell for awhile
In the Niblung house together by the hearth that forged the guile;
Yet amid the good and the guileless, and the love that thought no wrong,
Shall they fashion the deeds to remember, and the fame that endureth for long:
And oft shall he look on Brynhild, and oft her words shall he hear,
And no hope and no beseeching in his inmost heart shall stir.

So he spake as a King of the people in whom all fear is dead,
 And his anguish no man noted, as the greeting-words he said:
 "Hail, fairest of all things fashioned! hail, thou desire of eyes!
 Hail, chooser of the mightiest, and teacher of the wise!
 Hail, wife of my brother Gunnar! in might may thy days endure,
 And in peace without a trouble that the world's weal may be sure!"

She heard and turned unto Gunnar as a queen that seeketh her place,
 But to Gudrun she gave no greeting, nor beheld the Niblung's face.
 Then up stood the wife of Sigurd and strove with the greeting-word,
 But the cold fear rose in her heart, and the hate within her stirred,
 And the greeting died on her lips, and she gazed for a moment or twain
 On the lovely face of Brynhild, and so sat in the high-seat again,
 And turned to her lord beside her with many a word of love.

But the song sprang up in the hall, and the eagles cried from above,
 And forth to the freshness of May went the joyance of the feast:
 And Sigurd sat with the Niblungs, and gave ear to most and to least,
 And showed no sign to the people of the grief that on him lay;
 Nor seemeth he worsen to any than he was on the yesterday.

Of the Contention betwixt the Queens.

So there are all these abiding in the Burg of the ancient folk
 Mid the troth-plight sworn and broken, and the oaths of the earthly yoke.
 Then Guttorm comes from his sea-fare, and is waxen fierce and strong,
 A man in the wars delighting, blind-eyed through right and wrong:
 Still Sigurd rides with the Brethren, as oft in the other days,
 And never a whit abateth the sound of the people's praise;
 They drink in the hall together, they doom in the people's strife,
 And do every deed of the King-folk, that the world may rejoice in their life.

There now is Brynhild abiding as a Queen in the house of the Kings,
 And hither and thither she wendeth through the day of queenly things;
 And no man knoweth her sorrow; though whiles is the Niblung bed
 Too hot and weary a dwelling for the temples of her head,
 And she wends, as her wont was aforetime, when the moon is riding high,
 And the night on the earth is deepest; and she deemeth it good to lie
 In the trench of the windy mountains, and the track of the wandering sheep,
 While soft in the arms of Sigurd Queen Gudrun lieth asleep:
 There she cries on the lovely Sigurd, and she cries on the love and the oath,
 And she cries on the change and the vengeance, and the death to deliver them both.
 But her crying none shall hearken, and her sorrow nought shall know,
 Save the heart of the golden Sigurd, and the man fast bound in woe:
 So she wendeth her back in the dawning, toward the deeds and the dwellings of men,
 And she sits in the Niblung high-seat, and is fair and queenly again.
 Close now is her converse with Gudrun, and sore therein she strives
 Lest the barren stark contention should mingle in their lives;
 And she humbles her oft before her, as before the Queen of the earth,
 The mistress, the overcomer, the winner of all that is worth:
 And Gudrun beareth it all, and deemeth it little enow
 Though the wife of Sigurd be worshipped: and the scorn in her heart doth grow,
 Of every soul save Sigurd: for that tale of the night she bears
 Scarce hid 'twixt the lips and the bosom; and with evil eye she hears
 Songs sung of the deeds of Gunnar, and the rider of the fire,
 Who mocked at the bane of King-folk to win his heart's desire:

But Sigurd's will constraineth, and with seeming words of peace
She deals with the converse of Brynhild, and the days her load increase.

Men tell how the heart-wise Hogni grew wiser day by day;
He knows of the craft of Grimhild, and how she looketh to sway
The very council of God-home and the Norns' unchanging mind;
And he saith that well-learned is his mother, but that e'en her feet are blind
Down the path that she cannot escape from: nay oft is she nothing, he saith,
Save a staff for the foredoomed staying, and a sword for the ordered death;
And that he will be wiser than this, nor thrust his desire aside,
Nor smother the flame of his hatred; but the steed of the Norns will he ride,
Till he see great marvels and wonders, and leave great tales to be told:
And measureless pride is in him, a stern heart, stubborn and cold.

But of Gunnar the Niblung they say it, that the bloom of his youth is o'er,
And many are manhood's troubles, and they burden him oft and sore.
He dwells with Brynhild his wife, with Grimhild his mother he dwells,
And noble things of his greatness, of his joy, the rumour tells;
Yet oft and oft of an even he thinks of that tale of the night,
And the shame springs fresh in his heart at his brother Sigurd's might;
And the wonder riseth within him, what deed did Sigurd there,
What gift to the King hath he given: and he looks on Brynhild the fair,
The fair face never smiling, and the eyes that know no change,
And he deems in the bed of the Niblungs she is but cold and strange;
And the Lie is laid between them, as the sword lay while agone.
He hearkens to Grimhild moreover, and he deems she is driving him on,
He knoweth not whither nor wherefore: but she tells of the measureless Gold,
And the Flame of the uttermost Waters, and the Hoard of the kings of old:
And she tells of kings' supplanters, and the leaders of the war,
Who take the crown of song-craft, and the tale when all is o'er:
She tells of kings' supplanters, and saith: Perchance 'twere well,
Might some tongue of the wise of the earth of those deeds of the night-tide tell:
She tells of kings' supplanters: I am wise, and the wise I know,
And for nought is the sword-edge whetted, save the smiting of the blow:
Old friends are last to sever, and twain are strong indeed,
When one the King's shame knoweth, and the other knoweth his need.

So Gunnar hearkens and hearkens, and he saith, It is idle and worse:
If the oath of my brother be broken, let the earth then see to the curse!
But again he hearkens and hearkens, and when none may hear his thought
He saith in the silent night-tide: Shall my brother bring me to nought?
Must my stroke be a stroke of the guilty, though on sackless folk it fall?
Shall a king sit joy-forsaken mid the riches of his hall?
And measureless pride is in Gunnar, and it blends with doubt and shame,
And the unseen blossom is envy and desire without a name.

But fair-faced, calm as a God who hath none to call his foes,
Betwixt the Kings and the people the golden Sigurd goes;
No knowledge of man he lacketh, and the lore he gained of old
From the ancient heart of the Serpent and the Wallower on the Gold
Springs fresh in the soul of Sigurd; the heart of Hogni he sees,
And the heart of his brother Gunnar, and he grieveth sore for these.
But he seeth the heart of Brynhild, and knoweth her lonely cry
When the waste is all about her, and none but the Gods are anigh:
And he knoweth her tale of the night-tide, when desire, that day doth dull,
Is stirred by hope undying, and fills her bosom full
Of the sighs she may not utter, and the prayers that none may heed;
Though the Gods were once so mighty the smiling world to speed.

And he knows of the day of her burden, and the measure of her toil,
 And the peerless pride of her heart, and her scorn of the fall and the foil.
 And the shadowy wings of the Lie, that with hand unwitting he led
 To the Burg of the ancient people, brood over board and bed;
 And the hand of the hero faileth, and seared is the sight of the wise,
 And good is at one with evil till the new-born death shall arise.

In the hall sitteth Sigurd by Brynhild, in the council of the Kings,
 And he hearkeneth her spoken wisdom, and her word of lovely things:
 In the field they meet, and the wild-wood; on the acre and the heath;
 And scarce may he tell if the meeting be worse than the coward's death,
 Or better than life of the righteous: but his love is a flaming fire,
 That hath burnt up all before it of the things that feed desire.

The heart of Gudrun he seeth, her heart of burning love,
 That knoweth of nought but Sigurd on the earth, in the heavens above,
 Save the foes that encompass his life, and the woman that wasteth away
 'Neath the toil of a love like her love, and the unrewarded day:
 For hate her eyes hath quickened, and no more is Gudrun blind,
 And sure, though dim it may be, she seeth the days behind:
 And the shadowy wings of the Lie, that the hand unwitting led
 To the love and the heart of Gudrun, brood over board and bed;
 And for all the hand of the hero and the foresight of the wise,
 From the heart of a loving woman shall the death of men arise.

It was most in these latter days that his fame went far abroad,
 The helper, the overcomer, the righteous sundering sword;
 The loveliest King of the King-folk, the man of sweetest speech,
 Whose ear is dull to no man that his helping shall beseech;
 The eye-bright seer of all things, that wasteth every wrong,
 The straightener of the crooked, the hammer of the strong:
 Lo, such was the Son of Sigmund in the days whereof I tell,
 The dread of the doom and the battle; and all children loved him well.

Now it happed on a summer season mid the blossom of the year,
 When the clouds were high and little, and the sun exceeding clear,
 That Queen Brynhild arose in the morning, and longed for the eddying pool,
 And the Water of the Niblungs her summer sleep to cool:
 So she set her face to the river, where the hawthorn and the rose
 Hide the face of the sunlit water from the yellow-blossomed close
 And the house-built Burg of the Niblungs; for there by a grassy strand
 The shallow water floweth o'er white and stoneless sand
 And deepeneth up and outward; and the bank on the further side
 Goes high and shear and rocky the water's face to hide
 From the plain and the horse-fed meadow: there the wives of the Niblungs oft
 Would play in the wide-spread water when the summer days were soft;
 And thither now goes Brynhild, and the flowery screen doth pass,
 When lo, fair linen raiment falls before her on the grass,
 And she looks, and there is Gudrun, the white-armed Niblung child,
 All bare for the sunny river and the water undefiled.
 Round she turned with her face yet dreamy with the love of yesternight,
 Till the flush of anger changed it: but Brynhild's face grew white,
 Though soft she spake and queenly:

"Hail, sister of my lord!

Thou art fair in the summer morning 'twixt the river and the sward!"

Then she disarrayed her shoulders and cast her golden girth,
 And she said: "Thou art sister of Gunnar, and the kin of the best of the earth;
 So shalt thou go before me to meet the water cold."

Then, smiling nowise kindly, doth Gudrun her behold,
And she saith: "Thou art wrong, Queen Brynhild, to give the place to me,
For she that is wife of the greatest more than sister-kin shall be.
—Nay, if here were the sister of Sigurd ne'er before me should she go,
Though sister were she surely of the best that the earth-folk know:
Yet I linger not, since thou biddest, for the courteous of women thou art;
And the love of the night and the morning is heavy at my heart;
For the best of the world was beside me, while thou layest with Gunnar the King."

She laughs and leaps, and about her the glittering waters spring:
But Brynhild laugheth in answer, and her face is white and wan
As swift she taketh the water; and the bed-gear of the swan
Wreathes long folds round about her as she wadeth straight and swift
Where the white-scaled slender fishes make head against the drift:
Then she turned to the white-armed Gudrun, who stood far down the stream
In the lapping of the west-wind and the rippling shallows' gleam,
And her laugh went down the waters, as the war-horn on the wind,
When the kings of war are seeking, and their foes are fain to find.

But Gudrun cried upon her, and said: "Why wadest thou so
In the deeps and the upper waters, and wilt leave me here below?"

Then e'en as one transfigured loud Brynhild cried, and said:
"So oft shall it be between us at hall and board and bed;
E'en so in Freyia's garden shall the lilies cover me,
While thou on the barren footways thy gown-hem folk shall see:
E'en so shall the gold cloths lap me, when we sit in Odin's hall,
While thou shiverest, little hidden, by thy lord, the Helper's thrall,
By the serving-man of Gunnar, who all his bidding doth,
And waits by the door of the bower while his master plighteth the troth:
But my mate is the King of the King-folk who rode the Wavering Fire,
And mocked at the ruddy death to win his heart's desire.
Lo now, it is meet and righteous that ye of the happy days
Should bow the heads and wonder at the wedding all men praise.
O, is it not goodly and sweet with the best of the earth to dwell,
And the man that all shall worship when the tale grows old to tell!
For the woe and the anguish endure not, but the tale and the fame endure,
And as wavering wind is the joyance, but the Gods' renown shall be sure:
It is well, O ye troth-breakers! there was found a man to ride
Through the waves of my Flickering Fire to lie by Brynhild's side."

Then no word answered Gudrun till she waded up the stream
And stretched forth her hand to Brynhild, and thereon was a golden gleam,
And she spake, and her voice was but little:

"Thou mayst know by this token and sign
If the best of the kings of man-folk and the master of masters is thine."

White waxed the face of Brynhild as she looked on the glittering thing:
And she spake: "By all thou lovest, whence haddest thou the ring?"

Then Gudrun laughed in her glory the face of the Queen to see:
"Thinkst thou that my brother Gunnar gave the Dwarf-wrought ring to me?"

Nought spake the glorious woman, but as one who clutcheth a knife
She turned on the mocking Gudrun, and again spake Sigurd's wife:

"I had the ring, O Brynhild, on the night that followed the morn,
When the semblance of Gunnar left thee in thy golden hall forlorn:
And he, the giver that gave it, was the Helper's war-got thrall,
And the babe King Elf uplifted to the war-dukes in the hall;
And he rode with the heart-wise Regin, and rode the Glittering Heath,

And gathered the Golden Harvest and smote the Worm to the death:
 And he rode with the sons of the Niblungs till the words of men must fail
 To tell of the deeds of Sigurd and the glory of his tale:
 Yet e'en as thou sayst, O Brynhild, the bidding of Gunnar he did,
 For he cloaked him in Gunnar's semblance and his shape in Gunnar's hid:—
 Thou all-wise Queen of the Niblungs, was this so hard a part
 For the learned in the lore of Regin, who ate of the Serpent's heart?
 —Thus he wooed the bride for Gunnar, and for Gunnar rode the fire;
 And he held thine hand for Gunnar, and lay by thy dead desire.
 We have known thee for long, O Brynhild, and great is thy renown;
 In this shalt thou joy henceforward and nought in thy wedding crown.“

Now is Brynhild wan as the dead, and she openeth her mouth to speak,
 But no word cometh outward: then the green bank doth she seek,
 And casteth her raiment upon her, and flees o'er the meadow fair,
 As though flames were burning beneath it, and red gleeds the daisies were:
 But fair with face triumphant from the water Gudrun goes,
 And with many a thought of Sigurd the heart within her glows.

And yet as she walked the meadow a fear upon her came,
 What deeds are the deeds of women in their anguish and their shame;
 And many a heavy warning and many a word of fate
 By the lips of Sigurd spoken she remembereth overlate;
 Yet e'en to the heart within her she dissembleth all her dread.
 Daylong she sat in her bower in glee and goodlihead,
 But when the day was departing and the earl-folk drank in the hall
 She went alone in the garden by the nook of the Niblung wall;
 There she thought of that word in the river, and of how it were better unsaid,
 And she looked with kind words to hide it, as men bury their battle-dead
 With the spice and the sweet-smelling raiment: in the cool of the eve she went
 And murmured her speech of forgiveness and the words of her intent,
 While her heart was happy with love: then she lifted up her face,
 And lo, there was Brynhild the Queen hard by in the leafy place;
 Then the smile from her bright eyes faded and a flush came over her cheek
 And she said: "What dost thou, Brynhild? what matter dost thou seek?"

But the word of Sigurd smote her, and she spake ere the answer came:
 "Hard speech was between us, Brynhild, and words of evil and shame;
 I repent, and crave thy pardon: wilt thou say so much unto me,
 That the Niblung wives may be merry, as great queens are wont to be?"

But no word answered Brynhild, and the wife of Sigurd spake:
 "Lo, I humble myself before thee for many a warrior's sake,
 And yet is thine anger heavy—well then, tell all thy tale,
 And the grief that sickens thine heart, that a kindly word may avail.“

Then spake Brynhild and said: "Thou art great and livest in bliss,
 And the noble queens and the happy should ask better tidings than this:
 For ugly words must tell it; thou shouldst scarce know what they mean;
 Thou, the child of the mighty Niblungs, thou, Sigurd's wedded queen.
 It is good to be kindly and soft while the heart hath all its will.“

Said the Queen: "There is that in thy word that the joy of my heart would kill.
 I have humbled myself before thee, and what further shall I say?"

Then spake Brynhild the Queen: "I spake heavy words today;
 And thereof do I repent me; but one thing I beseech thee and crave:
 That thou speak but a word in thy turn my life and my soul to save:
 —Yea the lives of many warriors, and the joy of the Niblung home,
 And the days of the unborn children, and the health of the days to come—

Say thou it was Gunnar thy brother that gave thee the Dwarf-lord's ring,
And not the glorious Sigurd, the peerless lovely King;
E'en so will I serve thee for ever, and peace on this house shall be,
And rest ere my departing, and a joyous life for thee;
And long life for the lovely Sigurd, and a glorious tale to tell.
O speak, thou sister of Gunnar, that all may be better than well!"

But hard grew the heart of Gudrun, and she said: "Hast thou heard the tale
That the wives of the Niblungs lie, lest the joy of their life-days fail?
Wilt thou threaten the house of the Niblungs, wilt thou threaten my love and my lord?
—It was Sigurd that lay in thy bed with thee and the edge of the sword;
And he told me the tale of the night-tide, and the bitterest tidings thereof,
And the shame of my brother Gunnar, how his glory was turned to a scoff;
And he set the ring on my finger with sweet words of the sweetest of men,
And no more from me shall it sunder—lo, wilt thou behold it again?"
And her hand gleamed white in the even with the ring of Andvari thereon,
The thrice-cursed burden of greed and the grain from the needy won;
Then uprose the voice of Brynhild, and she cried to the towers aloft:

"O house of the ancient people, I blessed thee sweet and soft;
In the day of my grief I blessed thee, when my life seemed evil and long;
Look down, O house of the Niblungs, on the hapless Brynhild's wrong!
Lest the day and the hour be coming when no man in thy courts shall be left
To remember the woe of Brynhild, and the joy from her life-days reft;
Lest the grey wolf howl in the hall, and the wood-king roll in the porch,
And the moon through thy broken rafters be the Niblungs' feastful torch."

"O God-folk hearken," cried Gudrun, "what a tale there is to tell!
How a Queen hath cursed her people, and the folk that hath cherished her well!"

"O Niblung child," said Brynhild, "what bitterer curse may be
Than the curse of Grimhild thy mother, and the womb that carried thee?"

"Ah fool!" said the wife of Sigurd, "wilt thou curse thy very friend?
But the bitter love bewrays thee, and thy pride that nought shall end."

"Do I curse the accursèd?" said Brynhild, "but yet the day shall come,
When thy word shall scarce be better on the threshold of thine home;
When thine heart shall be dulled and chilly with e'en such a mingling of might,
As in Sigurd's cup she mingled, and thou shalt not remember aright."

Out-brake the child of the Niblungs: "A witless lie is this;
But thou sickenest sore for Sigurd, and the giver of all bliss:
A ruthless liar thou art: thou wouldst cut off my glory and gain,
Though it further thine own hope nothing, and thy longing be empty and vain.
Ah, thou hungerest after mine husband!—yet greatly art thou wed,
And high o'er the kings of the Goth-folk doth Gunnar rear the head."

"Which one of the sons of Giuki," said Brynhild, "durst to ride
Through the waves of my Flickering Fire to lie by Brynhild's side?
Thou shouldst know him, O Sister of Kings; let the glorious name be said,
Lest mine oath in the water be written, and I wake up, vile and betrayed,
In the arms of the faint-heart dastard, and of him that loveth life,
And casteth his deeds to another, and the wooing of his wife."

"Yea, hearken," said she of the Niblungs, "what words the stranger saith!
Hear the words of the fool of love, how she feareth not the death,
Nor to cry the shame on Gunnar, whom the King-folk tremble before:
The wise and the overcomer, the crown of happy war!"

Said Brynhild: "Long were the days ere the Son of Sigmund came;
Long were the days and lone, but nought I dreamed of the shame.

So may the day come, Grimhild, when thine eyes know not thy son!
Think then on the man I knew not, and the deed thy guile hath done!“

Then coldly laughed Queen Gudrun, and she said: ”Wilt thou lay all things
On the woman that hath loved thee and the Mother of the Kings?
O all-wise Queen of the Niblungs, was this change too hard a part
For the learned in the lore of Regin, who ate of the Serpent’s heart?“

Then was Brynhild silent a little, and forth from the Niblung hall
Came the sound of the laughter of men to the garth by the nook of the wall;
And a wind arose in the twilight, and sounds came up from the plain
Of kine in the dew-fall wandering, and of oxen loosed from the wain,
And the songs of folk free-hearted, and the river rushing by;
And the heart of Brynhild hearkened and she cried with a grievous cry:

”O Sigurd, O my Sigurd, we twain were one, time was,
And the wide world lay before us and the deeds to bring to pass!
And now I am nought for helping, and no helping mayst thou give;
And all is marred and evil, and why hast thou heart to live?“

She held her peace for anguish, and forth from the hall there came
The shouts of the joyous Niblungs, and the sound of Sigurd’s name:
And Brynhild turned from Gudrun, and lifted her voice and said:
”O evil house of the Niblungs, may the day of your woe and your dread
Be meted with the measure of the guile ye dealt to me,
When ye sealed your hearts from pity and forgot my misery!“

And she turned to flee from the garden; but her gown-lap Gudrun caught,
And cried: ”Thou evil woman, for thee were the Niblungs wrought,
And their day of the fame past telling, that they should heed thy life?
Dear house of the Niblung glory, fair bloom of the warriors’ strife,
How well shalt thou stand triumphant, when all we lie in the earth
For a little while remembered in the story of thy worth!“

But the lap of her linen raiment did Brynhild tear from her hold
And spake from her mouth brought nigher, and her voice was low and cold:

”Such pride and comfort in Sigurd henceforward mayst thou find,
Such joy of his life’s endurance, as thou leav’st me joy behind!“

But turmoil of wrath wrapt Gudrun, that she knew not the day from the night,
And she hardened her heart for evil as the warriors when they smite:
And she cried: ”Thou filled with murder, my love shall blossom and bloom
When thou liest in the hell forgotten! smite thence from the deedless gloom,
Smite thence at the lovely Sigurd, from the dark without a day!
Let the hand that death hath loosened the King of Glory slay!“

So died her words of anger, and her latter speech none heard,
Save the wind of the early night-tide and the leaves by its wandering stirred;
For amidst her wrath and her blindness was the hapless Brynhild gone:
And she fled from the Burg of the Niblungs and cried to the night alone:

”O Sigurd, O my Sigurd, what now shall give me back
One word of thy loving-kindness from the tangle and the wrack?
O Norns, fast bound from helping, O Gods that never weep,
Ye have left stark death to help us, and the semblance of our sleep!
Yet I sleep and remember Sigurd; and I wake and nought is there,
Save the golden bed of the Niblungs, and the hangings fashioned fair:
If I stretch out mine hand to take it, that sleep that the sword-edge gives,
How then shall I come on Sigurd, when again my sorrow lives
In the dreams of the slumber of death? O nameless, measureless woe,
To abide on the earth without him, and alone from earth to go!“

So wailed the wife of Gunnar, as she fled through the summer night,
 And unwitting around she wandered, till again in the dawning light
 She stood by the Burg of the Niblungs, and the dwelling of her lord.
 Awhile bode the white-armed Gudrun on the edge of the daisied sward,
 Till she shrank from the lonely flowers and the chill, speech-burdened wind.
 Then she turned to the house of her fathers and her golden chamber kind;
 And for long by the side of Sigurd hath she lain in light-breathed sleep,
 While yet the winds of night-tide round the wandering Brynhild sweep.

Gunnar talketh with Brynhild.

On the morrow awakeneth Gudrun; and she speaketh with Sigurd and saith:
 "For what cause is Brynhild heavy, and as one who abideth but death?"
 "Yea," Sigurd said, "is it so? as a great queen she goes upon earth,
 And thoughtful of weighty matters, and things that are most of worth."
 "It was other than this," said Gudrun, "that I deemed her yesterday;
 All men would have said great trouble on the wife of Gunnar lay."
 "Is it so?" said Sigurd the Volsung, "Ah, I sore misdoubt me then,
 That thereof shall we hear great tidings that shall be for the ruin of men."
 "Why grieveth she so," said Gudrun, "a queen so mighty and wise,
 The Chooser of the war-host, the desire of many eyes,
 The Queen of the glorious Gunnar, the wife of the man she chose?
 And she sits by his side on the high-seat, as the lily blooms by the rose."
 "Where then in the world was Brynhild," said he, "when she spake that word,
 And said that her belovèd was her very earthly lord?"
 Then was Sigurd silent a little, and Gudrun spake no more;
 For despite the heart of the Niblungs, and her love exceeding sore,
 With fear her soul was smitten for the word that Sigurd spake,
 And yet more for his following silence; and the stark death seemed to awake
 And stride through the Niblung dwelling, and the sunny morn grew dim:
 Till, lo, the voice of the Volsung, and the speech came forth from him:
 "Hearken, Gudrun my wife; the season is nigh at hand,
 Yea, the day is now on the threshold, when thou alone in the land
 Shalt answer for Sigurd departed, and shalt say that I loved thee well;
 And yet if thou hear'st men say it, then true is the tale to tell,
 That Brynhild was my belovèd in the tide and the season of youth;
 And as great as is thy true-love, e'en so was her love and her truth.
 But for this cause thus have I spoken, that the tale of the night hast thou told,
 And cast the word unto Brynhild, and shown her the token of gold.
 —A deed for the slaying of many, and the ending of my life,
 Since I betrayed her unwitting.—Yet grieve not, Gudrun my wife!
 For cloudy of late were the heavens with many a woven lie,
 And now is the clear of the twilight, when the slumber draweth anigh.
 But call up the soul of the Niblungs, and harden thine heart to bear,
 For wert thou not sprung from the mighty, today were thy portion of fear:
 Yea, thou wottest it even as I; but I see thine heart arise,
 And the soul of the mighty Niblungs, and fair is the love in thine eyes."
 Then forth went the King from the chamber to the council of the Kings,
 And he sat with the wise in the Doom-ring for the sifting of troublous things,
 And rejoiced the heart of the people: and the Wrath kept watch by his side.
 And his eyen were nothing dimmer than on many a joyous tide.
 But abed lay Brynhild the Queen, as a woman dead she lay,
 And no word for better or worse to the best of her folk would she say:

So they bore the tidings to Gunnar, and said: "Queen Brynhild ails
With a sickness whereof none knoweth, and death o'er her life prevails."

Then uprose Gunnar the Niblung, and he went to Brynhild his wife,
And prayed her to strengthen her heart for the glory of his life:
But she gave not a word in answer, nor turned to where he stood,
And there rose up a fear in his heart, and he looked for little of good:
There he bode for a long while silent, and the thought within him stirred
Of wise speech of his mother Grimhild, and many a warning word:
But he spake:

"Art thou smitten of God, unto whom shall we cast the prayer?
Art thou wronged by one of the King-folk, for whom shall the blades be bare?"

Belike she never heard him; she lay in her misery,
And the slow tears gushed from her eyen and nought of the world would she see.
But ill thoughts arose in Gunnar, and remembrance of the speech
Erst spoken low by Grimhild; yet he turned his heart to beseech,
And he spake again:

"O Brynhild, if I ever made thee glad,
If the glory of the great-ones of my gift thine heart hath had.
As mine heart hath been faithful to thee, as I longed for thy life-days' gain,
Tell now of thy toil and thy trouble that we each of each may be fain!"

Nought spake she, nothing she moved, and the tears were dried on her cheek;
But the very words of Grimhild did Gunnar's memory seek;
He sought and he found and considered; and mighty he was and young,
And he thought of the deeds of his fathers and the tales of the Niblungs sung;
How they bore no God's constraining, and rode through the wrong and the right
That the storm of their wrath might quicken, and their tempest carry the light.
The words of his mother he gathered and the wrath-flood over him rolled,
And with it came many a longing, that his heart had never told,
Nay, scarce to himself in the night-tide, for the gain of the ruddy rings,
And the fame of the earth unquestioned and the mastery over kings,
And he sole King in the world-throne, unequalled, unconstrained;
And with wordless wrath he fretted at the bonds that his glory had chained,
And the bitter anger stirred him, and at last he spake and cried:

"How long, O all-wise Brynhild, like the dead wilt thou abide,
Nor speak to thy lord and thy husband and the man that rode thy Fire,
And mocked at the bane of King-folk to accomplish thy desire?
I deem thou sickenest, Brynhild, with the love of a mighty-one,
The foe, the King's supplanter, he that so long hath shone
Mid the honour of our fathers, and the lovely Niblung house,
Like a serpent amidst of the treasure that the day makes glorious."

Yet never a word she answered, nor unto the great King turned,
Till through all the patience of King-folk the flame of his anger burned,
And his voice was the rattling thunder, as he cried across the bed:

"O who art thou, fearful woman? art thou one of the first of the dead?
Hast thou long ago seen and hated the tide of the Niblung praise,
And clad thee in flesh twice over for the bane of our happy days?
Art thou come from the far-off country that none may live and behold
For the bane of the King of the Niblungs, and of Sigurd lord of the Gold?"

Then she raised herself on her elbow and turned her eyes on the King:
"O tell me, Gunnar," she said, "that thou gavest Andvari's Ring
To thy sister the white-armed Gudrun!—thou, not thy captain of war,
The son of the God-born Volsungs, the Lord of the Treasure of yore!
O swear it that I may live! that I may be glad in thine hall,

And weave with the wisdom of women, and broider the purple and pall,
 And look in thy face at the chess-play, and drink of thy carven cup,
 And whisper a word in season when the voice of the wise goes up,
 And speak thee the speech of kindness by the hallowed Niblung hearth.
 O swear it, King of the Niblungs, lest thine honour die of the dearth!
 O swear it, lord I have wedded, lest mine honour come to nought,
 And I be but a wretch and a bondmaid for a year's embracing bought!"
 Till his heart hath heard her meaning at the golden bed he stares,
 And the last of the words she speaketh flit empty past his ears;
 For he knows that the tale of the night-tide hath been told and understood,
 And now of her shame was he deeming e'en worse than Brynhild would.
 So he turns from her face and the chamber with his glory so undone,
 That he saith the Gods did evil when the mighty work they won,
 And wrought the Burg of the Niblungs, and fashioned his fathers' days,
 And led them on to the harvest of the deeds and the people's praise.
 And nought he sees to amend it, save the hungry eyeless sword,
 And the war without hope or honour, and the strife without reward.
 So alone he goeth his ways, and the morn to the noontide falls,
 And the sun goeth down in the heavens, and fades from the Niblung walls,
 And the dusk and the dark draw over, and no man the King may see.
 But Sigurd sits in the hall mid the war-dukes' company:
 Alone of the Kings in the Doom-ring, and the council of the wise,
 By the street and the wharf and the burg-gate he shines in the people's eyes;
 Stately and lovely to look on he heareth of good and of ill,
 And he knitteth up and divideth, with life and death at his will.

Of the exceeding great grief and mourning of Brynhild.

Now the sun cometh up in the morning and shines o'er holt and heath,
 And the wall of the mighty mountains, and the sheep-fed slopes beneath,
 And the horse-fed plain and the river, and the acres of the wheat,
 And the herbs of bane and of healing, and the garden hedges sweet;
 It shines on the sea and the shepherd, and the husbandman's desire;
 On the Niblung Burg it shineth and smiteth the vanes afire;
 And in Gudrun's bower it shineth, and seeth small joy therein,
 For hushed the fair-clad maidens the work of women win;
 Then Gudrun looketh about her, and she saith:
 "Why sit ye so,
 That I hearken but creak of the loom-stock and the battens' homeward blow?
 Why is your joy departed and your sweet speech fallen dumb?
 Are the Niblungs fled from the battle, is their war-host overcome?
 Have the Norns given forth their shaming? have they fallen in the fight?
 Yet the sun shines notwithstanding, and the world around is bright."
 Then answered a noble woman, and the wise of maids was she:
 "Thou knowest, O lovely lady, that nought of this may be;
 Yet with woe that the world shall hearken the glorious house is filled,
 On the hearth of all men hallowed the cup of joy is spilled.
 —A dread, an untimely hour, an exceeding evil day!"
 Then the wife of Sigurd answered: "Arise and go thy way
 To the chamber of Queen Brynhild, and bid her wake at last,
 For that long have we slept and slumbered, and the deedless night is passed:
 Bid her wake to the deeds of queen-folk, and be glad as the world-queens are
 When they look on the people that loves them, and thrust all trouble afar.

Let her foster her greatness and glory, and the fame no ages forget,
That tomorn may as yesterday blossom, yea more abundantly yet."

Then arose the light-foot maiden: but she stayed and spake by the door:
"O Gudrun, I durst not behold her, for the days of her joyance are o'er,
And the days of her life are numbered, and her might is waxen weak,
And she lieth as one forsaken, and no word her lips will speak,
Nay, not to her lord that loveth: but all we deem, O Queen,
That the wrath of the Gods is upon her for ancient deeds unseen."

Nought answered the white-armed Gudrun, but the fear in her soul arose,
For she thought of the golden Sigurd, and the compassing of foes,
And great grew the dread of her maidens as they gazed upon her face:
But she rose and looked not backward as she hastened from her place,
And sought the King of the Niblungs by hall and chamber and stair,
And bright was the pure mid-morning and the wind was fresh and fair.

So she came on her brother Gunnar, as he sat apart and alone,
Arrayed in the Niblung war-gear, nor moved he more than the stone
In the jaws of the barren valley and the man-deserted dale;
On his knees was the breadth of the sunshine, and thereon lay the edges pale,
The war-flame of the Niblungs, the sword that his right hand knew:

White was the fear on her lips, and hard at her heart it drew.
As she spake:

"I have found thee, O brother! O Gunnar, go to her and say
That my heart is grieved with her grief and I mourn for her evil day."

Then Gunnar answered her word, but his words were heavy and slow:
"Thou know'st not the words thou speakest—and wherefore should I go,
Since I am forbidden to share it, the woe or the weal of her heart?
Look thou on the King of the Niblungs, how he sitteth alone and apart,
Fast bound in the wiles of women, and the web that a traitor hath spun,
And no deed for his hand he knoweth, or to do or to leave undone."

Wan-faced from before him she fled, and she went with hurrying feet,
And no child of man in her going would she look upon or greet,
Till she came unto Hogni the Wise; and he sat in his war-array,
The coal-blue gear of the Niblungs, and the sword o'er his knees there lay:

She sickened, and said: "What dost thou? what then is the day and the deed,
That the sword on thy knees is naked, and thou clad in the warrior's weed?
Go in, go in to Brynhild, and tell her how I mourn
For the grief whereof none wotteth that hath made her days forlorn."

"It is good, my sister," said Hogni, "to abide in the harness of war
When the days and the days are changing, and the Norns' feet stand by the door.
I will nowise go in unto Brynhild, lest the evil tide grow worse.
For what woman will bear the sorrow and burden her soul with a curse
If she may escape it unbidden? and there are words that wound
Far worse than the bitter edges, though wise in the air they sound.
Bide thou and behold things fated! Hast thou learned how men may teach
The stars in their ordered courses, or lead the Norns with speech?"

She stood and trembled before him, nor durst she long behold
The silent face of Hogni and the far-seeing eyes and cold.
So she gat her forth from before him, and Sigurd her husband she sought,
And the speech on her lips was ready, till the chill fear made it nought;
For apart and alone was he sitting in all his war-gear clad,
And Fafnir's Helm of Aweing, and Regin's Wrath he had,
And over the breast of Sigurd was the Hauberk all of gold
That hath not the like in the heavens nor has earth of its fellow told.

But he set her down beside him and said: "What fearest thou then?
What terror strideth in daylight mid the peace of the Niblung men?"
She cried: "The Helm and the Sword, and the golden guard of thy breast!"
"So oft, O wife," said Sigurd, "is a war-king clad the best
When the peril quickens before him, and on either hand is doubt;
Thus men wreath round the beaker whence the wine shall be soon poured out.
But hope thou not overmuch, for the end is not today;
And fear thou little indeed, for not long shall the sword delay:
But speak, O daughter of Giuki, for thy lips scarce held the word
Ere thou sawest the gleam of my hauberk and the edge of the ancient Sword,
The Light that hath lain in the Branstock, the hope of the Volsung tree,
The Sunderer, the Deliverer, the torch of days to be."

She sighed; for her heart was heavy for the days but a while ago,
When the death was little dreamed of, and the joy was lightly won;
And her soul was bitter with anger for the day that Brynhild had led
To the heart of the Niblung glory: but fear thrust on, and she said:
"O my lord, O Sigurd the mighty, an evil day is this,
A chill, an untimely hour for the blooming of our bliss!
Go in to my sister Brynhild, and tell her of very sooth
That my heart for her sorrow sorrows, and is sick for woe and ruth."
"The hour draws nigh," said Sigurd, "for I know of the speech and the word
That is kind in the air to hearken, and is worse than the whetted sword.
Now is Brynhild sore encompassed by a tide of measureless woe,
And amidst and anear, as I see it, she seeth the death-star grow.
Yet belike it is, O Gudrun, that thy will herein shall be done;
But now depart, I pray thee, and leave thy lord alone:
Heavy and hard shall it be, for a season shall it endure,
But the grief and the sorrow shall perish, and the fame of the Gods is sure."

Yet she sat by his side and spake not, and a while at his glory she gazed,
For his face o'erpassed the brightness that so long the folk had praised,
And she durst not question or touch him, and at last she rose from his side,
And gat her away soft-footed, and wandered far and wide
Through the house and the Burg of the Niblungs; yet durst she never more
Go look on the Niblung Brethren as they sat in their harness of war.

But the morn to the noon hath fallen, and the afternoon to the eve,
And the beams of the westering sun the Niblung wall-stones leave,
And yet sitteth Sigurd alone; then the sun sinketh down into night,
And the moon ariseth in heaven, and the earth is pale with her light:
And there sitteth Sigurd the Volsung in the gold and the harness of war
That was won from the heart-wise Fafnir and the guarded Treasure of yore,
But pale is the Helm of Aweing, and wan are the ruddy rings:
So whiles in a city forsaken ye see the shapes of kings,
And the lips that the carvers wrought, while their words were remembered and known,
And the brows men trembled to look on in the long-enduring stone,
And their hands once unforgotten, and their breasts, the walls of war;
But now are they hidden marvels to the wise and the master of lore,
And he nameth them not, nor knoweth, and their fear is faded away.

E'en so sat Sigurd the Volsung till the night waxed moonless and grey,
Till the chill dawn spread o'er the lowland, and the purple fells grew clear
In the cloudless summer dawn-dusk, and the sun was drawing anear:
Then reddened the Burg of the Niblungs, and the walls of the ancient folk,
And a wind came down from the mountains and the living things awoke
And cried out for need and rejoicing; till, lo, the rim of the sun

Showed over the eastern ridges, and the new day was begun;
 And the beams rose higher and higher, and white grew the Niblung wall,
 And the spears on the ramparts glistened and the windows blazed withal,
 And the sunlight flooded the courts, and throughout the chambers streamed:
 Then bright as the flames of the heaven the Helm of Aweing gleamed,
 Then clashed the red rings of the Treasure, as Sigurd stood on his feet,
 And went through the echoing chambers, as the winds in the wall-nook beat;
 And there in the earliest morning while the lords of the Niblungs lie
 'Twixt light sleep and awakening they hear the clash go by,
 And their dreams are of happy battle, and the songs that follow fame,
 And the hope of the Gods accomplished, and the tales of the ancient name,
 Ere Sigurd came to the Niblungs and faced their gathered foes.
 But on to the chamber of Brynhild alone in the morning he goes,
 And the sun lieth broad across it, and the door is open wide
 As the last of the women had left it; then he lifted his voice and cried:

"Awake, arise, O Brynhild! for the house is smitten through
 With the light of the sun awakened, and the hope of deeds to do."

She spake: "Art thou come to behold me? thou, the mightiest and the worst
 Of the pitiless betrayers, that the hope of my life hath nursed."

He said: "It is I that awake thee, and I give thee the life and the days
 For fulfilling the deedful measure, and the cup of the people's praise."

She cried: "O the gifts of Sigurd!—Ah why didst thou cast me aside,
 That we twain should be dwelling, the strangers, in the house of the Niblung pride?
 What life is the death in life? what deeds—where the shame cometh up
 Betwixt the speech of the wise-ones and the draught of the welcoming cup;
 And the shame and repentance awaketh when the song in the harp is awake?
 Where we rise in the morning for nothing, and lie down for no love's sake?
 Where thou ridest forth to the battle and the dead hope dulleth thy light,
 And with shame thy hand is cumbered when the sword is uplifted to smite?
 O Sigurd, what hast thou done, that the gifts are cast aback?
 —O nay, no life of repentance!—but the bitter sword and the wrack!"

"O Brynhild, live!" said the Volsung, "for what shall the world be then
 When thou from the earth art departed, and the hallowed hearths of men?"

She said: "Woe worth the while for the word that hath come from thy mouth!
 As the bitter weltering ocean to the shipman dying of drouth,
 E'en so is the life thou biddest, since thou pitiedst not thine own,
 Nor thy love, nor the hope of thy life-days, but must dwell as a glory alone!"

"It is truer to tell," said Sigurd, "that mine heart in thy love was enwrapped
 Till the evil hour of the darkening, and the eyeless tangle had happed:
 And thereof shalt thou know, O Brynhild, on one day better than I,
 When the stroke of the sword hath been smitten, and the night hath seen me die:
 Then belike in thy fresh-springing wisdom thou shalt know of the dark and the deed,
 And the snare for our feet fore-ordered from whence they shall never be freed.
 But for me, in the net I awakened and the toils that unwitting I wove,
 And no tongue may tell of the sorrow that I had for thy wedded love:
 But I dwelt in the dwelling of kings; so I thrust its seeming apart
 And I laboured the field of Odin: and e'en this was a joy to my heart,
 That we dwelt in one house together, though a stranger's house it were."

"O late, and o'erlate!" cried Brynhild—"may the dead folk hearken and hear?
 All was and today it is not—And the Oath unto Gunnar is sworn,
 Shall I live the days twice over, and the life thou hast made forlorn?"

And she heard the words of Hindfell and the oath of the earlier day,
 Till the daylight darkened before her, and all memory passed away,

And she cried: "I may live no longer, for the Gods have forgotten the earth,
And my heart is the forge of sorrow, and my life is a wasting dearth."

Then once again spake Sigurd, once only and no more:
A pillar of light all golden he stood on the sunlit floor;
And his eyes were the eyes of Odin, and his face was the hope of the world,
And his voice was the thunder of even when the bolt o'er the mountains is hurled:
The fairest of all things fashioned he stood 'twixt life and death,
And the Wrath of Regin rattled, and the rings of the Glittering Heath,
As he cried:

"I am Sigurd the Volsung, and belike the tale shall be true
That no hand on the earth may hinder what my hand would fashion and do:
And what God or what man shall gainsay it if our love be greater than these,
The pride and the glory of Sigurd, and the latter days' increase?
O live, live, Brynhild beloved! and thee on the earth will I wed,
And put away Gudrun the Niblung—and all those shall be as the dead."

But so swelled the heart within him as he cast the speech abroad,
That the golden wall of the battle, the fence unrent by the sword.
The red rings of the uttermost ocean on the breast of Sigurd brake:
And he saw the eyes of Brynhild, and turned from the word she spake:

"I will not wed thee, Sigurd, nor any man alive."

Then Sigurd goes out from before her; and the winds in the wall-nook strive,
And the craving of fowl and the beast-kind with the speech of men is blent,
And the voice of the sons of the Niblungs; and their day's first hour is spent
As he goes through the hall of the War-dukes, and many an earl is astir,
But none durst question Sigurd lest of evil days he hear:
So he comes to his kingly chamber, and there sitteth Gudrun alone,
And the fear in her soul is minished, but the love and the hatred are grown:
She is wan as the moonlit midnight; but her heart is cold and proud,
And she asketh him nought of Brynhild, and nought he speaketh aloud.

Of the slaying of Sigurd the Volsung.

Ere the noon ariseth Brynhild, and forth abroad she goes,
And sits by the wall of her bower 'twixt the lily and the rose;
Great dread and sickness is on her, as it shall be once on the morn
When the uttermost sun is arisen 'neath the blast of the world-shaking horn:
Her maidens come and go, but none dares cast her a word;
From the wall the warders behold her, and turn round to the spear and the sword;
Yea, few dare speak of Brynhild as morning fadeth in noon
In the Burg of the ancient people mid the stir and the glory of June.

Then cometh forth speech from Brynhild, and she calls to her maidens and saith:
"Go tell ye the King of the Niblungs that I am arisen from death,
And come forth from the uttermost sickness, and with him I needs must speak:
That we look into weighty matters and due deeds for king-folk seek."

So they went and returned not again, and it was but a little space
Ere she looked, and behold, it was Gunnar that stood before her face,
And his war-gear darkened the noon-tide and the grey helm gleamed from his head,
But his eyes were fearful beneath it: then she gazed on the heavens and said:

"Thou art come, O King of the Niblungs; what mighty deed is to frame
That thou wearest the cloudy harness, and the arms of the Niblung name?"

He spake: "O woman, thou mockest! what King of the people is here?
Are not all kings confounded, and all peoples' shame laid bare?
Shall the Gods grow little to help, or men grow great to amend?"

Nay, the hunt is up in the world and the Gods to the forest will wend,
 And their hearts are exceeding merry as they ride and drive the prey:
 But what if the bear grin on them, and the wood-beast turn to bay?
 What now if the whelp of their breeding a wolf of the world be grown,
 To cry out in the face of their brightness and mar their glad renown?"

She heeded him not, nor hearkened: but he said: "Thou wert wise of old;
 And hither I come at thy bidding: let the thought of thine heart be told."

She said: "What aileth thee, Gunnar? time was thou wert great and glad.
 And that was yester-morning: how then is the good turned bad?"

He said: "I was glad in my dreams, and I woke and my glory was dead."
 "Hath a God then wrought thee evil, or one of the King-folk?" she said.

He said: "In the snare am I taken, in the web that a traitor hath spun;
 And no deed knoweth my right-hand to do or to leave undone."

"I look upon thee," said Brynhild, "I know thy race and thy name.
 Yet meseems the deed thou sparest, to amend thine evil and shame."

"Nought, nought," he said, "may amend it, save the hungry eyeless sword.
 And the war without hope or honour, and the strife without reward."

"Thou hast spoken the word," said Brynhild, "if the word is enough, it is well.
 Let us eat and drink and be merry, that all men of our words may tell!"

"O all-wise woman," said Gunnar, "what deed lieth under the tongue?
 What day for the dearth of the people, when the seed of thy sowing hath sprung?"

She said: "Our garment is Shame, and nought the web shall rend,
 Save the day without repentance, and the deed that nought may amend."

"Speak, mighty of women," said Gunnar, "and cry out the name and the deed
 That the ends of the Earth may hearken, and the Niblungs' grievous Need."

"To slay," she said, "is the deed, to slay a King ere the morn,
 And the name is Sigurd the Volsung, my love and thy brother sworn."

She turned and departed from him, and he knew not whither she went;
 But he took his sword from the girdle and the peace-strings round it rent,
 And into the house he gat him, and the sunlit fair abode,
 But his heart in the mid-mirk waded, as through the halls he strode,
 Till he came to a chamber apart; and Grimhild his mother was there,
 And there was his brother Hogni in the cloudy Niblung gear:
 Him-seemed there was silence between them as of them that have spoken, and wait
 Till the words of their mouths be accomplished by slow unholpen Fate:
 But they turned to the door, and beheld him, and he took his sheathed sword
 And cast it adown betwixt them, and it clashed half bare on the board,
 And Grimhild spake as it clattered: "For whom are the peace-strings rent?
 For whom is the blood-point whetted and the edge of thine intent?"

He said: "For the heart of Sigurd; and thus all is rent away
 Betwixt this word and his slaying, save a little hour of day."

Then spake Hogni and answered: "All lands beneath the sun
 Shall know and hearken and wonder that such a deed must be done."

"Speak, brother of Kings," said Gunnar, "dost thou know deeds better or worse
 That shall wash us clean from shaming, and redeem our lives from the curse?"

"I am none of the Norns," said Hogni, "nor the heart of Odin the Goth,
 To avenge the foster-brethren, or broken love and troth:
 Thy will is the story fated, nor shall I look on the deed
 With uncursed hands unreddened, and edges dulled at need."

Again spake Grimhild the wise-wife: "Where then is Guttorm the brave?
 For he blent not his blood with the Volsung's, nor his oath to Sigurd gave,

Nor called on Earth to witness, nor went beneath the yoke;
And now is he Sigurd's foeman; and who may curse his stroke?"

Then Hogni laughed and answered: "His feet on the threshold stand:
Forged is thy sword, O Mother, and its hilts are come to hand,
And look that thou whet it duly; for the Norns are departed now;
From the blood of our foster-brother no branch of bale shall grow;
Hoodwinked are the Gods of heaven, their sleep-dazed eyes are blind;
They shall peer and grope through the darkness, and nought therein shall find,
Save the red right hand of Guttorm, and his lips that never swore;
At the young man's deed shall they wonder, and all shall be covered o'er:
Ho, Guttorm, enter, and hearken to the counsel of the wise!"

Then in through the door strode Guttorm fair-clad in hunter's guise,
With no steel save his wood-knife girded; but his war-fain eyes stared wild,
As he spake: "What words are ye hiding from the youngest Niblung child?
What work is to win, my brethren, that ye sit in warrior's weed,
And tell me nought of the glory, and cover up the deed?"

Then uprose Grimhild the wise-wife, and took the cup again;
Night-long had she brewed that witch-drink and laboured not in vain,
For therein was the creeping venom, and hearts of things that prey
On the hidden lives of ocean, and never look on day;
And the heart of the ravening wood-wolf and the hunger-blinded beast
And the spent slaked heart of the wild-fire the guileful cup increased:
But huge words of ancient evil about its rim were scored,
The curse and the eyeless craving of the first that fashioned sword.

So the cup in her hand was gleaming, as she turned unto Guttorm and spake;
"Be merry, King of the War-fain! we hold counsel for thy sake:
The work is a God's son's slaying, and thine is the hand that shall smite,
That thy name may be set in glory and thy deeds live on in light."

Forth flashed the flame from his eyen, and he cried: "Where then is the foe,
This dread of mine house and my brethren, that my hand may lay him alow?"

"Drink, son," she said, "and be merry! and I shall tell his name,
Whose death shall crown thy life-days, and increase thy fame with his fame."

He drinketh and craveth for battle, and his hand for a sword doth seek,
And he looketh about on his brethren, but his lips no word may speak;
They speak the name, and he hears not, and again he drinks of the cup
And knows not friend nor kindred, and the wrath in his heart wells up,
That no God may bear unmingled, and he cries a wordless cry,
As the last of the day is departing and the dusk time drawing anigh.

Then Grimhild goes from the chamber, and bringeth his harness of war,
And therewith they array his body, and he drinketh the cup once more,
And his heart is set on the murder, and now may he understand
What soul is dight for the slaying, and what quarry is for his hand.
For again, they tell him of Sigurd, and the man he remembereth,
And praiseth his mighty name and his deeds that laughed on death.

Now dusk and dark draw over, and through the glimmering house
They go to the place of the Niblungs, the high hall and glorious;
For hard by is the chamber of Sigurd: there dight in their harness of war
In their thrones sit Gunnar and Hogni, but Guttorm stands on the floor
With his blue blade naked before them: the torches flare from the wall
And the woven God-folk waver, but the hush is deep in the hall,
And those Niblung faces change not, though the slow moon slips from her height
And earth is acold ere dawning, and new winds shake the night.

Now it was in the earliest dawn-dusk that Guttorm stirred in his place,
And the mail-rings tinkled upon him, as he turned his helm-hid face,
And went forth from the hall and the high-seat; but the Kings sat still in their pride
And hearkened the clash of his going and heeded how it died.

Slow, all alone goeth Guttorm to Sigurd's chamber door,
And all is open before him, and the white moon lies on the floor
And the bed where Sigurd lieth with Gudrun on his breast,
And light comes her breath from her bosom in the joy of infinite rest.
Then Guttorm stands on the threshold, and his heart of the murder is fain,
And he thinks of the deeds of Sigurd, and praiseth his greatness and gain;
Bright blue is his blade in the moonlight—but lo, how Sigurd lies,
As the carven dead that die not, with fair wide-open eyes;
And their glory gleameth on Guttorm, and the hate in his heart is chilled,
And he shrinketh aback from the threshold and knoweth not what he willed.

But his brethren heed and hearken, and they hear the clash draw nigh,
But they stir no whit in their pride, though the lord of all creatures should die.
Then they see where cometh Guttorm, but they cast him never a word,
For white 'neath the flickering torches they see his unstained sword;
But he gazed on those Kings of the kindred, and the beast of war awoke;
And his heart was exceeding wrathful with the tarrying of the stroke:
And he strode to the chamber of Sigurd, and again they heeded well
How the clash, in the cloister awakened, by the threshold died and fell.

But Guttorm gazed from the threshold, and the moon was fading away
From the golden bed of Sigurd, and the Niblung woman lay
On the bosom of the Volsung, and her hand lay light on her lord;
But dread were his eyes wide-open, and they gleamed against the sword,
And Guttorm shrank from before them, and back to the hall he came:
There the biding brethren behold him flash wild in the torches' flame,
Nor stir their lips to question; but their swords on their knees are laid;
The torches faint in the dawning, and they see his unstained blade.

Now dieth moon and candle, and though the day be nigh
The roof of the hall fair-built seems far aloof as the sky,
But a glimmer grows on the pavement and the ernes on the roof-ridge stir:
Then the brethren hist and hearken, for a sound of feet they hear,
And into the hall of the Niblungs a white thing cometh apace:
But the sword of Guttorm upriseth, and he wendeth from his place,
And the clash of steel goes with him; yet loud as it may sound
Still more they hear those footsteps light-falling on the ground,
And the hearts of the Niblungs waver, and their pride is smitten acold,
For they look on that latest comer, and Brynhild they behold:
But she sits by their side in silence, and heeds them nothing more
Than the grey soft-footed morning heeds yester-even's war.

But Guttorm clashed in the cloisters and through the silence strode
And scarce on the threshold of Sigurd a little while abode:
There the moon from the floor hath departed and heaven without is grey,
And afar in the eastern quarter faint glimmer streaks of day.
Close over the head of Sigurd the Wrath gleams wan and bare,
And the Niblung woman stirreth, and her brow is knit with fear;
But the King's closed eyes are hidden, loose lie his empty hands,
There is nought 'twixt the sword of the slayer and the Wonder of all Lands.
Then Guttorm laughed in his war-rage, and his sword leapt up on high,
As he sprang to the bed from the threshold and cried a wordless cry,
And with all the might of the Niblungs through Sigurd's body thrust,
And turned and fled from the chamber, and fell amid the dust,

Within the door and without it, the slayer slain by the slain;
For the cast of the sword of Sigurd had smitten his body atwain
While yet his cry of onset through the echoing chambers went.

Woe's me! how the house of the Niblungs by another cry was rent,
The wakening wail of Gudrun, as she shrank in the river of blood
From the breast of the mighty Sigurd: he heard it and understood,
And rose up on the sword of Guttorm, and turned from the country of death,
And spake words of loving-kindness as he strove for life and breath:

"Wail not, O child of the Niblungs! I am smitten, but thou shalt live,
In remembrance of our glory, mid the gifts the Gods shall give!"

She stayed her cry to hearken, and her heart well nigh stood still:
But he spake: "Mourn not, O Gudrun, this stroke is the last of ill;
Fear leaveth the House of the Niblungs on this breaking of the morn;
Mayst thou live, O woman beloved, unforsaken, unforslorn!"

Then he sank aback on the sword, and down to his lips she bent
If some sound therefrom she might hearken; for his breath was well-nigh spent:
"It is Brynhild's deed," he murmured, "and the woman that loves me well;
Nought now is left to repent of, and the tale abides to tell.
I have done many deeds in my life-days, and all these, and my love, they lie
In the hollow hand of Odin till the day of the world go by.
I have done and I may not undo, I have given and I take not again:
Art thou other than I, Allfather, wilt thou gather my glory in vain?"

There was silence then in the chamber, as the dawn spread wide and grey,
And hushed was the hall of the Niblungs at the entering-in of day.
Long Gudrun hung o'er the Volsung and waited the coming word;
Then she stretched out her hand to Sigurd and touched her love and her lord,
And the broad day fell on his visage, and she knew she was there alone,
And her heart was wrung with anguish and she uttered a weary moan:
Then Brynhild laughed in the hall, and the first of men's voices was that
Since when on yester-even the kings in the high-seat had sat.

But the wrath of Gunnar was kindled and the words of the king out-brake,
"Woe's me, thou wonder of women! thou art glad for no man's sake,
Nay not for thine own, meseemeth, for thou bidest here as the dead,
As the pale ones stricken deedless, whose tale of life is sped."

She hearkened him not nor answered; and day came on apace,
And they heard the anguish of Gudrun and her voice in the ancient place.

"Awake, O House of the Niblungs! for my kin hath slain my lord.
Awake, awake, to the murder, and the edges of the sword!
Awake, go forth and be merry! and yet shall the day betide,
When ye stand in the garth of the foemen, and death is on every side,
And ye look about and around you, and right and left ye look
For the least of the hours of Sigurd, and his hand that the battle shook:
Then be your hope as mine is, then face ye death and shame
As I face the desolation, and the days without a name!"

And she shrieked as the woe gathered on her, and the sun rose over her head:
"Wake, wake, O men of this house, for Sigurd the Volsung is dead!"

In the house rose rumour and stir, and men stood up in the morn,
And their hearts with doubt were shaken, as if with the Uttermost Horn:
The cry and the calling spread, and shields clashed down from the wall,
And swords in the chamber glittered, and men ran apace to the hall.
Nor knew what man to question, nor who had tidings to give,
Nor what were the days thenceforward wherein the folk should live.

But ever the word is amongst them that Sigurd the Volsung is slain,
 And the spears in the hall were tossing as the rye in the windy plain.
 But they look aloft to the high-seat and they see the gleam of the gold:
 And Gunnar the King of battle, and Hogni wise and cold,
 And Brynhild the wonder of women; and her face is deadly pale,
 And the Kings are clad in their war-gear, and bared are the edges of bale.
 Then cold fear falleth upon them, but the noise and the clamour abate,
 And they look on the war-wise Gunnar and awhile for his word they wait;
 But e'en as he riseth above them, doth a shriek through the tumult ring:

"Awake, O House of the Niblungs, for slain is Sigurd the King!"

Then nothing faltered Gunnar, but he stood o'er the Niblung folk,
 And over the hall woe-stricken the words of pride he spoke:

"Mourn now, O Niblung people, for gone is Sigurd our guest,
 And Guttorm the King is departed, and this is our day of unrest;
 But all this of the Norns was fore-ordered, and herein is Odin's hand;
 Cast down are the mighty of men-folk, but the Niblung house shall stand:
 Mourn then today and tomorrow, but the third day waken and live,
 For the Gods died not this morning, and great gifts they have to give."

He spake and awhile was silence, and then did the cry outbreak,
 And many there were of the Earl-folk that wept for Sigurd's sake;
 And they wept for their little children, and they wept for those unborn,
 Who should know the earth without him and the world of his worth forlorn.
 But wild is the wailing of women as they fare to the place of the dead,
 Where cold is Gudrun sitting mid the waste of Sigurd's bed.
 Then they take the man beloved, and bear him forth to the hall,
 And spread the linen above him, and cloth of purple and pall;
 And meekly Gudrun followeth, and she sitteth down thereby,
 But mute is her mouth henceforward, and she giveth forth no cry,
 And no word of lamentation, though far abroad they weep
 For the gift of the Gods departed, and the golden Sigurd's sleep.

Meanwhile elsewhere the women and the wives of the Niblungs wail
 O'er the body of King Guttorm and array him for the bale,
 And Grimhild opens her treasure and bears forth plenteous gold
 And goodly things for his journey, and the land of Death acold.

So rent is the joy of the Niblungs; and their simple days and fain
 From that ancient house are departed, and who shall buy them again?
 For he, the redeemer, the helper, the crown of all their worth,
 They looked upon him and wondered, they loved; and they thrust him forth.

Of the mighty Grief of Gudrun over Sigurd dead.

Of old in the days past over was Gudrun blent with the dead,
 As she sat in measureless sorrow o'er Sigurd's wasted bed,
 But no sigh came from her bosom, nor smote she hand in hand,
 Nor wailed with the other women, and the daughters of the land;
 Then the wise of the Earls beheld her, smit cold with her dread intent,
 And they rose one after other, and before the Queen they went;
 Men ancient, men mighty in battle, men sweet of speech were there,
 And they loved her, and entreated, and spake good words to hear:
 But no tears and no lamenting in Gudrun's heart would strive
 With the deadly chill of sorrow that none may bear and live.

Now there were the King-folk's daughters, and wives of the Earls of war,
 The fair, and the noble-hearted, the wise in ancient lore;

And they rose one after other, and stood before the Queen
To tell of their woes past over, and the worst their eyes had seen:
There was Giaflaug, Giuki's sister, she was old and stark to see,
And she said:
"O heavyhearted; they slew my King from me:
Look up, O child of the Niblungs, and hearken mournful things
Of the woes of living man-folk and the daughters of the Kings!
Dead now is the last of my brethren; to the dead my sister went;
My son and my little daughter in the earliest days were spent:
On the earth am I living loveless, long past are the happy days,
They lie with things departed and vain and foolish praise,
And the hopes of hapless people: yet I sit with the people's lords
When men are hushed to hearken the least of all my words.
What else is the wont of the Niblungs? why else by the Gods were they wrought,
Save to wear down lamentation, and make all sorrow nought?"

No word of woe gat Gudrun, nor had she will to weep,
Such weight of woe was on her for the golden Sigurd's sleep:
Her heart was cold and dreadful; nor good from ill she knew
For the love they had taken from her, and the day with nought to do.

Then troth-plight maids forsaken, and never-wedded ones,
And they that mourned dead husbands and the hope of unborn sons,
These told of their bitterest trouble and the worst their eyes had seen;
"Yet all we live to love thee, and the glory of the Queen.
Look up, look up, O Gudrun! what rest for them that wail
If the Queens of men shall tremble, and the God-kin faint and fail?"

No voice gat Gudrun's sorrow, no care she had to weep;
For the deeds of the day she knew not, nor the dreams of Sigurd's sleep:
Her heart was cold and dreadful; nor good from ill she knew,
Because of her love departed, and the day with nought to do.

Then spake a Queen of Welshland, and Herborg hight was she:
"O frozen heart of sorrow, the Norns dealt worse with me:
Of old, in the days departed, were my brave ones under shield,
Seven sons, and the eighth, my husband, and they fell in the Southland field:
Yet lived my father and mother, yet lived my brethren four,
And I bided their returning by the sea-washed bitter shore:
But the winds and death played with them, o'er the wide sea swept the wave,
The billows beat on the bulwarks and took what the battle gave:
Alone I sang above them, alone I dight their gear
For the uttermost journey of all men, in the harvest of the year:
Nor wakened spring from winter ere I left those early dead;
With bound hands and shameful body I went as the sea-thieves led:
Now I sit by the hearth of a stranger; nor have I weal nor woe,
Save the hope of the Niblung masters and the sorrow of a foe."

No wailing word gat Gudrun, no thought she had to weep
O'er the sundering tide of Sigurd, and the loved lord's lonely sleep:
Her heart was cold and dreadful; nor good from ill she knew,
Since her love was taken from her and the day of deeds to do.

Then arose a maid of the Niblungs, and Gullrond was her name,
And betwixt that Queen of Welshland and Gudrun's grief she came:
And she said: "O foster-mother, O wise in the wisdom of old,
Hast thou spoken a word to the dead, and known them hear and behold?
E'en so is this word thou speakest, and the counsel of thy face."

All heed gave the maids and the warriors, and hushed was the spear-thronged place,
 As she stretched out her hand to Sigurd, and swept the linen away
 From the lips that had holpen the people, and the eyes that had gladdened the day;
 She set her hand unto Sigurd, and turned the face of the dead
 To the moveless knees of Gudrun, and again she spake and said:

"O Gudrun, look on thy loved-one; yea, as if he were living yet
 Let his face by thy face be cherished, and thy lips on his lips be set!"

Then Gudrun's eyes fell on it, and she saw the bright-one's hair
 All wet with the deadly dew-fall, and she saw the great eyes stare
 At that cloudy roof of the Niblungs without a smile or frown;
 And she saw the breast of the mighty and the heart's wall rent adown:
 She gazed and the woe gathered on her, so exceeding far away
 Seemed all she once had cherished from that which near her lay;
 She gazed, and it craved no pity, and therein was nothing sad,
 Therein was clean forgotten the hope that Sigurd had:
 Then she looked around and about her, as though her friend to find,
 And met those woeful faces but as grey reeds in the wind,
 And she turned to the King beneath her and raised her hands on high,
 And fell on the body of Sigurd with a great and bitter cry;
 All else in the house kept silence, and she as one alone
 Spared not in that kingly dwelling to wail aloud and moan;
 And the sound of her lamentation the peace of the Niblungs rent,
 While the restless birds in the wall-nook their song to the green leaves sent;
 And the geese in the home-mead wandering clanged out beneath the sun;
 For now was the day's best hour, and its loveliest tide begun.

Long Gudrun lay on Sigurd, and her tears fell fast on the floor
 As the rain in midmost April when the winter-tide is o'er,
 Till she heard a wail anigh her and how Gullrond wept beside,
 Then she knew the voice of her pity, and rose upright and cried:

"O ye, e'en such was my Sigurd among these Giuki's sons,
 As the hart with the horns day-brightened mid the forest-creeping ones;
 As the spear-leek fraught with wisdom mid the lowly garden grass;
 As the gem on the gold band's midmost when the council cometh to pass,
 And the King is lit with its glory, and the people wonder and praise.
 —O people, Ah thy craving for the least of my Sigurd's days!

O wisdom of my Sigurd! how oft I sat with thee
 Thou striver, thou deliverer, thou hope of things to be!
 O might of my love, my Sigurd! how oft I sat by thy side,
 And was praised for the loftiest woman and the best of Odin's pride!
 But now am I as little as the leaf on the lone tree left,
 When the winter wood is shaken and the sky by the North is cleft."

Then her speech grew wordless wailing, and no man her meaning knew;
 Till she hushed her swift and turned her; for a laugh her wail pierced through,
 As a whistling shaft the night-wind in some foe-encompassed wood;
 And lo, by the nearest pillar the wife of Gunnar stood;
 There stood the allwise Brynhild 'gainst the golden carving pressed,
 As she stared at the wound of Sigurd and that rending of his breast:
 But she felt the place fallen silent, and the speechless anger set
 On her own chill, bitter sorrow; and the eyes of the women met,
 And they stood in the hall together, as they stood that while ago,
 When they twain in Brynhild's dwelling of days to come would know:
 But every soul kept silence, and all hearts were chill as stone
 As Brynhild spake:

"Thou woman, shall thine eyes be wet alone?

Shalt thou weep and speak in thy glory, when I may weep no more,
When I speak, and my speech is as silence to the man that loved me sore?"

Then folk heard the woe of Gudrun, and the bitterness of hate:
"Day cursed o'er every other! when they opened wide the gate,
And Kings in gold arrayed them, and all men the joy might hear,
As Greyfell neighed in the forecourt the world's delight to bear,
And my brethren shook the world-ways as they rode to Brynhild's bower,
—An ill day—an evil woman—a most untimely hour!"

But she wailed: "The seat is empty, and empty is the bed,
And earth is hushed henceforward of the words my speech-friend said!
Lo, the deeds of the sons of Giuki, and my brethren of one womb!
Lo, the deeds of the sons of Giuki for the latter days of doom!
O hearken, hearken Gunnar! May the dear Gold drag thee adown,
And Greyfell's ruddy Burden, and the Treasure of renown,
And the rings that ye swore the oath on! yea, if all avengers die,
May Earth, that ye bade remember, on the blood of Sigurd cry!
Be this land as waste as the trothplight that the lips of fools have sworn!
May it rain through this broken hall-roof, and snow on the hearth forlorn!
And may no man draw anigh it to tell of the ruin and the wrack!
Yea, may I be a mock for the idle if my feet come ever aback,
If my heart think kind of the chambers, if mine eyes shall yearn to behold
The fair-built house of my fathers, the house beloved of old!"

Then she waileth out before them, and hideth her face from the day,
And she casteth her down from the high-seat and fleeth fast away;
And forth from the Hall of the Niblungs, and forth from the Burg is she gone,
And forth from the holy dwellings, and a long way forth alone,
Till she comes to the lonely wood-waste, the desert of the deer
By the feet of the lonely mountains, that no man draweth anear;
But the wolves are about and around her, and death seems better than life,
And folding the hands and forgetting a merrier thing than strife;
And for long and long thereafter no man of Gudrun knows,
Nor who are the friends of her life-days, nor whom she calleth her foes.

But how great in the hall of the Niblungs is the voice of weeping and wail!
Men bide on the noon's departing, men bide till the eve shall fail,
Then they wend one after other to the sleep that all men win,
Till few are the hall-abiders, and the moon is white therein,
And no sound in the house may ye hearken save the ernes that stir o'erhead,
And the far-off wail o'er Guttorm and the wakeners o'er the dead:
But still by the carven pillar doth the all-wise Brynhild stand
A-gaze on the wound of Sigurd, nor moveth foot nor hand,
Nor speaketh word to any, of them that come or go
Round the evil deed of the Niblungs and the corner-stone of woe.

Of the passing away of Brynhild.

Once more on the morrow-morning fair shineth the glorious suns
And the Niblung children labour on a deed that shall be done.
For out in the people's meadows they raise a bale on high,
The oak and the ash together, and thereon shall the Mighty lie;
Nor gold nor steel shall be lacking, nor savour of sweet spice,
Nor cloths in the Southlands woven, nor webs of untold price:
The work grows, toil is as nothing; long blasts of the mighty horn
From the topmost tower out-wailing o'er the woeful world are borne.

But Brynhild lay in her chamber, and her women went and came,
 And they feared and trembled before her, and none spake Sigurd's name;
 But whiles they deemed her weeping, and whiles they deemed indeed
 That she spake, if they might but hearken, but no words their ears might heed;
 Till at last she spake out clearly:

"I know not what ye would;

For ye come and go in my chamber, and ye seem of wavering mood
 To thrust me on, or to stay me; to help my heart in woe,
 Or to bid my days of sorrow midst nameless folly go."

None answered the word of Brynhild, none knew of her intent;
 But she spake: "Bid hither Gunnar, lest the sun sink o'er the bent,
 And leave the words unspoken I yet have will to speak."

Then her maidens go from before her, and that lord of war they seek,
 And he stands by the bed of Brynhild and strives to entreat and beseech,
 But her eyes gaze awfully on him, and his lips may learn no speech.
 And she saith:

"I slept in the morning, or I dreamed in the waking-hour,
 And my dream was of thee, O Gunnar, and the bed in thy kingly bower,
 And the house that I blessed in my sorrow, and cursed in my sorrow and shame,
 The gates of an ancient people, the towers of a mighty name:
 King, cold was the hall I have dwelt in, and no brand burned on the hearth;
 Dead-cold was thy bed, O Gunnar, and thy land was parched with dearth:
 But I saw a great King riding, and a master of the harp,
 And he rode amidst of the foemen, and the swords were bitter-sharp,
 But his hand in the hand-gyves smote not, and his feet in the fetters were fast,
 While many a word of mocking at his speechless face was cast.
 Then I heard a voice in the world: 'O woe for the broken troth,
 And the heavy Need of the Niblungs, and the Sorrow of Odin the Goth!
 Then I saw the halls of the strangers, and the hills, and the dark-blue sea,
 Nor knew of their names and their nations, for earth was afar from me,
 But brother rose up against brother, and blood swam over the board,
 And women smote and spared not, and the fire was master and lord.
 Then, then was the moonless mid-mirk, and I woke to the day and the deed,
 The deed that earth shall name not, the day of its bitterest need.
 Many words have I said in my life-days, and little more shall I say:
 Ye have heard the dream of a woman, deal with it as ye may:
 For meseems the world-ways sunder, and the dusk and the dark is mine,
 Till I come to the hall of Freyia, where the deeds of the mighty shall shine."

So hearkened Gunnar the Niblung, that her words he understood,
 And he knew she was set on the death-stroke, and he deemed it nothing good:
 But he said: "I have hearkened, and heeded thy death and mine in thy words:
 I have done the deed and abide it, and my face shall laugh on the swords;
 But thee, woman, I bid thee abide here till thy grief of soul abate;
 Meseems nought lowly nor shameful shall be the Niblung fate;
 And here shalt thou rule and be mighty, and be queen of the measureless Gold,
 And abase the kings and upraise them; and anew shall thy fame be told,
 And as fair shall thy glory blossom as the fresh fields under the spring."

Then he casteth his arms about her, and hot is the heart of the King
 For the glory of Queen Brynhild and the hope of her days of gain,
 And he clean forgetteth Sigurd and the foster-brother slain:
 But she shrank aback from before him, and cried: "Woe worth the while
 For the thoughts ye drive back on me, and the memory of your guile!
 The Kings of earth were gathered, the wise of men were met;
 On the death of a woman's pleasure their glorious hearts were set,

And I was alone amidst them—Ah, hold thy peace hereof!
Lest the thought of the bitterest hours this little hour should move.“

He rose abashed from before her, and yet he lingered there;
Then she said: "O King of the Niblungs, what noise do I hearken and hear?
Why ring the axes and hammers, while feet of men go past,
And shields from the wall are shaken, and swords on the pavement cast,
And the door of the treasure is opened; and the horn cries loud and long,
And the feet of the Niblung children to the people's meadows throng?"

His face was troubled before her, and again she spake and said:
"Meseemeth this is the hour when men array the dead;
Wilt thou tell me tidings, Gunnar, that the children of thy folk
Pile up the bale for Guttorm, and the hand that smote the stroke?"

He said: "It is not so, Brynhild; for that Giuki's son was burned
When the moon of the middle heaven last night toward dawning turned.“

They looked on each other and spake not; but Gunnar gat him gone,
And came to his brother Hogni, the wise-heart Giuki's son,
And spake: "Thou art wise, O Hogni; go in to Brynhild the queen,
And stay her swift departing; or the last of her days hath she seen.“

"It is nought, thy word," said Hogni; "wilt thou bring dead men aback,
Or the souls of kings departed midst the battle and the wrack?
Yet this shall be easier to thee than the turning Brynhild's heart;
She came to dwell among us, but in us she had no part;
Let her go her ways from the Niblungs with her hand in Sigurd's hand.
Will the grass grow up henceforward where her feet have trodden the land?"

"O evil day," said Gunnar, "when my queen must perish and die!"

"Such oft betide," saith Hogni, "as the lives of men flit by;
But the evil day is a day, and on each day groweth a deed,
And a thing that never dieth; and the fateful tale shall speed.
Lo now, let us harden our hearts and set our brows as the brass,
Lest men say it, 'They loathed the evil and they brought the evil to pass.'"

So they spake, and their hearts were heavy, and they longed for the morrow morn,
And the morrow of tomorrow, and the new day yet to be born.

But Brynhild cried to her maidens: "Now open ark and chest,
And draw forth queenly raiment of the loveliest and the best,
Red rings that the Dwarf-lords fashioned, fair cloths that queens have sewed,
To array the bride for the mighty, and the traveller for the road.“

They wept as they wrought her bidding and did on her goodliest gear;
But she laughed mid the dainty linen, and the gold-rings fashioned fair:
She arose from the bed of the Niblungs, and her face no more was wan;
As a star in the dawn-tide heavens, mid the dusky house she shone:
And they that stood about her, their hearts were raised aloft
Amid their fear and wonder: then she spake them kind and soft:

"Now give me the sword, O maidens, wherewith I sheared the wind
When the Kings of Earth were gathered to know the Chooser's mind.“

All sheathed the maidens brought it, and feared the hidden blade,
But the naked blue-white edges across her knees she laid,
And spake: "The heaped-up riches, the gear my fathers left,
All dear-bought woven wonders, all rings from battle reft,
All goods of men desired, now strew them on the floor,
And so share among you, maidens, the gifts of Brynhild's store.“

They brought them mid their weeping, but none put forth a hand
To take that wealth desired, the spoils of many a land:

There they stand and weep before her, and some are moved to speech,
 And they cast their arms about her and strive with her, and beseech
 That she look on her loved-ones' sorrow and the glory of the day.
 It was nought; she scarce might see them, and she put their hands away
 And she said: "Peace, ye that love me! and take the gifts and the gold
 In remembrance of my fathers and the faithful deeds of old."

Then she spake: "Where now is Gunnar, that I may speak with him?
 For new things are mine eyes beholding and the Niblung house grows dim,
 And new sounds gather about me, that may hinder me to speak
 When the breath is near to flitting, and the voice is waxen weak."

Then upright by the bed of the Niblungs for a moment doth she stand,
 And the blade flasheth bright in the chamber, but no more they hinder her hand
 Than if a God were smiting to rend the world in two:

Then dulled are the glittering edges, and the bitter point cleaves through
 The breast of the all-wise Brynhild, and her feet from the pavement fail,
 And the sigh of her heart is hearkened mid the hush of the maidens' wail.
 Chill, deep is the fear upon them, but they bring her aback to the bed,
 And her hand is yet on the hilts, and sidelong droopeth her head.

Then there cometh a cry from withoutward, and Gunnar's hurrying feet
 Are swift on the kingly threshold, and Brynhild's blood they meet.
 Low down o'er the bed he hangeth and hearkeneth for her word,
 And her heavy lids are opened to look on the Niblung lord,
 And she saith:

"I pray thee a prayer, the last word in the world I speak,
 That ye bear me forth to Sigurd, and the hand my hand would seek;
 The bale for the dead is builded, it is wrought full wide on the plain,
 It is raised for Earth's best Helper, and thereon is room for twain:
 Ye have hung the shields about it, and the Southland hangings spread,
 There lay me adown by Sigurd and my head beside his head:
 But ere ye leave us sleeping, draw his Wrath from out the sheath,
 And lay that Light of the Branstock, and the blade that frightened deaths
 Betwixt my side and Sigurd's, as it lay that while agone,
 When once in one bed together we twain were laid alone:
 How then when the flames flare upward may I be left behind?
 How then may the road he wendeth be hard for my feet to find?
 How then in the gates of Valhall may the door of the gleaming ring
 Clash to on the heel of Sigurd, as I follow on my king?"

Then she raised herself on her elbow, but again her eyelids sank,
 And the wound by the sword-edge whispered, as her heart from the iron shrank,
 And she moaned: "O lives of man-folk, for unrest all overlong
 By the Father were ye fashioned; and what hope amendeth a wrong?
 Now at last, O my beloved, all is gone; none else is near,
 Through the ages of all ages, never sundered, shall we wear."

Scarce more than a sigh was the word, as back on the bed she fell,
 Nor was there need in the chamber of the passing of Brynhild to tell;
 And no more their lamentation might the maidens hold aback,
 But the sound of their bitter mourning was as if red-handed wrack
 Ran wild in the Burg of the Niblungs, and the fire were master of all.

Then the voice of Gunnar the war-king cried out o'er the weeping hall:
 "Wail on, O women forsaken, for the mightiest woman born!
 Now the hearth is cold and joyless, and the waste bed lieth forlorn.
 Wail on, but amid your weeping lay hand to the glorious dead,
 That not alone for an hour may lie Queen Brynhild's head:

For here have been heavy tidings, and the Mightiest under shield
Is laid on the bale high-built in the Niblungs' hallowed field.
Fare forth! for he abideth, and we do Allfather wrong,
If the shining Valhall's pavement await their feet o'erlong."

Then they took the body of Brynhild in the raiment that she wore,
And out through the gate of the Niblungs the holy corpse they bore,
And thence forth to the mead of the people, and the high-built shielded bale;
Then afresh in the open meadows breaks forth the women's wail
When they see the bed of Sigurd and the glittering of his gear;
And fresh is the wail of the people as Brynhild draweth anear,
And the tidings go before her that for twain the bale is built,
That for twain is the oak-wood shielded and the pleasant odours spilt.

There is peace on the bale of Sigurd, and the Gods look down from on high,
And they see the lids of the Volsung close shut against the sky,
As he lies with his shield beside him in the Hauberk all of gold,
That has not its like in the heavens, nor has earth of its fellow told;
And forth from the Helm of Aweing are the sunbeams flashing wide,
And the sheathed Wrath of Sigurd lies still by his mighty side.
Then cometh an elder of days, a man of the ancient times,
Who is long past sorrow and joy, and the steep of the bale he climbs;
And he kneeleth down by Sigurd, and bareth the Wrath to the sun
That the beams are gathered about it, and from hilt to blood-point run,
And wide o'er the plain of the Niblungs doth the Light of the Branstock glare,
Till the wondering mountain-shepherds on that star of noontide stare,
And fear for many an evil; but the ancient man stands still
With the war-flame on his shoulder, nor thinks of good or of ill,
Till the feet of Brynhild's bearers on the topmost bale are laid,
And her bed is dight by Sigurd's; then he sinks the pale white blade
And lays it 'twixt the sleepers, and leaves them there alone—
He, the last that shall ever behold them,—and his days are well nigh done.

Then is silence over the plain; in the noon shine the torches pale
As the best of the Niblung Earl-folk bear fire to the buidled bale:
Then a wind in the west ariseth, and the white flames leap on highs
And with one voice crieth the people a great and mighty cry,
And men cast up hands to the Heavens, and pray without a word,
As they that have seen God's visage, and the face of the Father have heard.

They are gone—the lovely, the mighty, the hope of the ancient Earth:
It shall labour and bear the burden as before that day of their birth:
It shall groan in its blind abiding for the day that Sigurd hath sped,
And the hour that Brynhild hath hastened, and the dawn that waketh the dead:
It shall yearn, and be oft-times holpen, and forget their deeds no more,
Till the new sun beams on Baldur, and the happy sealess shore.

1 GUDRUN.

Herein is told of the days of the niblungs after they slew sigurd, and of their woeful need and fall in the house of king atli.

King Atli wooeth and weddeth Gudrun.

Hear now of those Niblung war-kings, how in glorious state they dwell;
They do and undo at their pleasure and wear their life-days well;
They deal out doom to the people, and their hosts of war array,
Nor storm nor wind nor winter their eager swords shall stay:
They ride the lealand highways, they ride the desert plain,

They cry out kind to the Sea-god and loose the wave-steed's rein:
 They climb the unmeasured mountains, and gleam on the world beneath,
 And their swords are the blinding lightning, and their shields are the shadow of death:
 When men tell of the lords of the Goth-folk, of the Niblungs is their word,
 All folk in the round world's compass of their mighty fame have heard:
 They are lords of the Ransom of Odin, the uncounted sea-born Gold,
 The Grief of the wise Andvari, the Death of the Dwarfs of old,
 The gleaming Load of Greyfell, the ancient Serpent's Bed,
 The store of the days forgotten, by the dead heaped up for the dead.
 Lo, such are the Kings of the Niblungs, but yet they crave and desire
 Lest the world hold greater than they, lest the Gods and their kindred be higher.

Fair, bright is their hall in the even; still up to the cloudy roof
 There goeth the glee and the singing while the eagles chatter aloof,
 And the Gods on the hangings waver in the doubtful wind of night;
 Still fair are the linen-clad damsels, still are the war-dukes bright;
 Men come and go in the even; men come and go in the morn;
 Good tidings with the daybreak, fair fame with the glooming is born:
 —But no tidings of Sigurd and Brynhild, and whoso remembereth their days
 Turns back to the toil or the laughter from his words of lamenting or praise,
 Turns back to the glorious Gunnar, casts hope on the Niblung name,
 Doeth deeds from the morn to the even, and beareth no burden of shame.

Well wedded is Gunnar the King, and Hogni hath wedded a wife;
 Fair queens are those wives of the Niblungs, good helpmates in peace and in strife
 Sweet they sit on the golden high-seat, and Grimhild sitteth beside,
 And the years have made her glorious, and the days have swollen her pride;
 She looketh down on the people, from on high she looketh down,
 And her days have become a wonder, and her redes are wisdom's crown.
 She saith: Where then are the Gods? what things have they shapen and made
 More of might than the days I have shapen? of whom shall our hearts be afraid?

Now there was a King of the outlands, and Atli was his name,
 The lord of a mighty people, a man of marvellous fame,
 Who craved the utmost increase of all that kings desire;
 Who would reach his hand to the gold as it ran in the ruddy fire,
 Or go down to the ocean-pavement to harry the people beneath,
 Or cast up his sword at the Gods, or bid the friendship of death.

By hap was the man unwedded, and wide in the world he sought
 For a queen to increase his glory lest his name should come to nought;
 And no kin like the kin of the Niblungs he found in all the earth.
 No treasure like their treasure, no glory like their worth;
 So he sendeth an ancient war-duke with a goodly company,
 And three days they ride the mirk-wood and ten days they sail the sea,
 And three days they ride the highways till they come to Gunnar's land;
 And there on an even of summer in Gunnar's hall they stand,
 And the spears of Welshland glitter, and the Southland garments gleam,
 For those folk are fair apparelled as the people of a dream.

But the glorious Son of Giuki from amidst the high-seat spoke:
 "Why stand ye mid men sitting, or fast mid feasting folk?
 No meat nor drink there lacketh, and the hall is long and wide.
 Three days in the peace of the Niblungs unquestioned shall ye bide,
 Then timely do your message, and bid us peace or war."

But spake the Earl of Atli yet standing on the floor:
 "All hail, O glorious Gunnar, O mighty King of men!
 O'er-short is the life of man-folk, the three-score years and ten,

Long, long is the craft for the learning, and sore doth the right hand waste:
Lo, lord, our spurs are bloody, and our brows besweat with haste;
Our gear is stained by the sea-spray and rent by bitter gales,
For we struck no mast to the tempest, and the East was in our sails;
By the thorns is our raiment rended, for we rode the mirk-wood through,
And our steeds were the God-bred coursers, nor day from night-tide knew:
Lo, we are the men of Atli, and his will and his spoken word
Lies not beneath our pillow, nor hangs above the board;
Nay, how shall it fail but slay us if three days we hold it hid?
—I will speak to-night, O Niblung, save thy very mouth forbid:
But lo now, look on the tokens, and the rune-staff of the King.“

Then spake the Son of Giuki: "Give forth the word and the thing.
Since thy faithfulness constraineth: but I know thy tokens true,
And thy rune-staff hath the letters that in days ago I knew.“

"Then this is the word," said the elder, "that Atli set in my mouth:
'I have known thee of old, King Gunnar, when we twain drew sword in the south
In the days of thy father Giuki, and great was the fame of thee then:
But now it rejoiceth my heart that thou growest the greatest of men,
And anew I crave thy friendship, and I crave a gift at thy hands,
That thou give me the white-armed Gudrun, the queen and the darling of lands,
To be my wife and my helpmate, my glory in hall and afield;
That mine ancient house may blossom and fresh fruit of the King-tree yield.
I send thee gifts moreover, though little things be these.
But such is the fashion of great-ones when they speak across the seas:'“

Then cried out that earl of the strangers, and men brought the gifts and the gold;
White steeds from the Eastland horse-plain, fine webs of price untold,
Huge pearls of the nether ocean, strange masteries subtly wrought
By the hands of craftsmen perished and people come to nought.

But Gunnar laughed and answered: "King Atli speaketh well;
Across the sea, peradventure, I too a tale may tell:
Now born is thy burden of speech; so rejoice at the Niblung board,
For here art thou sweetly welcome for thyself and thy mighty lord:
And maybe by this time tomorrow, or maybe in a longer space,
Shall ye have an answer for Atli, and a word to gladden his face.“

So the strangers sit and are merry, and the Wonder of the East
And the glory of the Westland kissed lips in the Niblung feast.

But again on the morrow-morning speaks Gunnar with Grimhild and saith:
"Where then in the world is Gudrun, and is she delivered from death?
For nought hereof hast thou told me: but the wisest of women art thou,
And I deem that all things thou knowest, and thy cunning is timely now;
For King Atli wooeth my sister; and as wise as thou mayst be,
What thing mayst thou think of greater 'twixt the ice and the uttermost sea
Than the might of the Niblung people, if this wedding come to pass?“

Then answered the mighty Grimhild, and glad of heart she was:
"It is sooth that Gudrun liveth; for that daughter of thy folk
Fled forth from the Burg of the Niblungs when the Volsung's might ye broke:
She fled from all holy dwellings to the houses of the deer,
And the feet of the mountains deserted that few folk come anear:
There the wolves were about and around her, and no mind she had to live;
Dull sleep she deemed was better than with turmoiled thought to strive:
But there rode a wife in the wood, a queen of the daughters of men,
And she came where Gudrun abided, whose might was minished as then,
Till she was as a child forgotten; nor that queen might she gainsay;

Who took the white-armed Gudrun, and bore my daughter away
 To her burg o'er the hither mountains; there she cherished her soft and sweet,
 Till she rose, from death delivered, and went upon her feet:
 She awoke and beheld those strangers, a trusty folk and a kind,
 A goodly and simple people, that few lords of war shall find:
 Glorious and mighty they deemed her, as an outcast wandering God,
 And she loved their loving-kindness, and the fields of the tiller she trod,
 And went 'twixt the rose and the lily, and sat in the chamber of wool,
 And smiled at the laughing maidens, and sang over shuttle and spool.
 Seven seasons there hath she bided, and this have I wotted for long;
 But I knew that her heart is as mine to remember the grief and the wrong,
 So the days of thy sister I told not, in her life would I have no part,
 Lest a foe for thy life I should fashion, and sharpen a sword for thine heart:
 But now is the day of our deeds, and no longer durst I refrain,
 Lest I put the Gods' hands from me, and make their gifts but vain.
 Yea, the woman is of the Niblungs, and often I knew her of old,
 How her heart would burn within her when the tale of their glory was told.
 With wisdom and craft shall I work, with the gifts that Odin hath given,
 Wherewith my fathers of old, and the ancient mothers have striven."

"Thy word is good," quoth Gunnar, "a happy word indeed:
 Lo, how shall I fear a woman, who have played with kings in my need?
 Yea, how may I speak of my sister, save well remembering
 How goodly she was aforetime, how fair in everything,
 How kind in the days passed over, how all fulfilled of love
 For the glory of the Niblungs, and the might that the world shall move?
 She shall see my face and Hogni's, she shall yearn to do our will,
 And the latter days of her brethren with glory shall fulfil."

Then Grimhild laughed and answered: "Today then shalt thou ride
 To the dwelling of Thora the Queen, for there doth thy sister abide."

As she spake came the wise-heart Hogni, and that speech of his mother he heard,
 And he said: "How then are ye saying a new and wonderful word,
 That ye meddle with Gudrun's sorrow, and her grief of heart awake?
 Will ye draw out a dove from her nest, and a worm to your hall-hearth take?"

"What then," said his brother Gunnar, "shall we thrust by Atli's word?
 Shall we strive, while the world is mocking, with the might of the Eastland sword,
 While the wise are mocking to see it, how the great devour the great?"

"O wise-heart Hogni," said Grimhild, "wilt thou strive with the hand of fate,
 And thrust back the hand of Odin that the Niblung glory will crown?
 Wert thou born in a cot-carle's chamber, or the bed of a King's renown?"

"I know not, I know not," said Hogni, "but an unsure bridge is the sea,
 And such would I oft were builded betwixt my foeman and me.
 I know a sorrow that sleepeth, and a wakened grief I know,
 And the torment of the mighty is a strong and fearful foe."

They spake no word before him; but he said: "I see the road;
 I see the ways we must journey—I have long cast off the load,
 The burden of men's bearing wherein they needs must bind
 All-eager hope unseeing with eyeless fear and blind:
 So today shall my riding be light; nor now, nor ever henceforth
 Shall men curse the sword of Hogni in the tale of the Niblung worth."

Therewith he went out from before them, and through chamber and hall he cried
 On the best of the Niblung earl-folk, for that now the Kings would ride:
 Soon are all men assembled, and their shields are fresh and bright,
 Nor gold their raiment lacketh; then the strong-necked steeds they dight,

They dight the wain for Grimhild, and she goeth up therein,
And the well-clad girded maidens have left the work they win,
To sit by the Mother of Kings and make her glory great:
Then to horse get the Kings of the Niblungs, and ride out by the ancient gate;
And amidst its dusky hollows stir up the sound of swords:
Forth then from the hallowed houses ride on those war-fain lords,
Till they come to the dales deserted, and the woodland waste and drear;
There the wood-wolves shrink before them, fast flee the forest-deer,
And the stony wood-ways clatter as the Niblung host goes by.
Adown by the feet of the mountains that eve in sleep they lie,
And arise on the morrow-morning and climb the mountain-pass,
And the sunless hollow places, and the slopes that hate the grass.
So they cross the hither ridges and ride a stony bent
Adown to the dale of Thora, and the country of content;
By the homes of a simple people, by cot and close they go,
Till they come to Thora's dwelling; but fair it stands and low
Amidst of orchard-closes, and round about men win
Fair work in field and garden, and sweet are the sounds therein.

Then down by the door leaps Gunnar, but awhile in the porch he stands
To hearken the women's voices and the sound of their labouring hands;
And amidst of their many murmurings a mightier voice he hears,
The speech of his sister Gudrun: his inmost heart it stirs,
And he entereth glad and smiling; bright, huge in the lowly hall
He stands in the beam of sunlight where the dust-motes dance and fall.

On the high-seat sitteth Gudrun when she sees the man of war
Come gleaming into the chamber; then she standeth up on the floor,
And is great and goodly to look on mid the women of that place:
But she knoweth the guise of the Niblungs, and she knoweth Gunnar's face,
And at first she turneth to flee, as erewhile she fled away
When she rose from the wound of Sigurd and loathed the light of day:
But her father's heart rose in her, and the sleeping wrong awoke,
And she made one step from the high-seat before Queen Thora's folk;
And Gunnar moved from the threshold, and smiled as he drew anear,
And Hogni went behind him and the Mother of Kings was there;
And her maids and the Earls of the Niblungs stood gleaming there behind:
Lo, the kin and the friends of Gudrun, a smiling folk and kind!

In the midst stood Gudrun before them, and cried aloud and said:
"What! bear ye tidings of Sigurd? is he new come back from the dead?
O then will I hasten to greet him, and cherish my love and my lord,
Though the murderous sons of Giuki have borne the tale abroad."

Dead-pale she stood before them, and no mouth answered again,
And the summer morn grew heavy, and chill were the hearts of men
And Thora's people trembled: there the simple people first
Saw the horror of the King-folk, and mighty lives accurst.

All hushed stood the glorious Gunnar, but Hogni came before,
And he said: "It is sooth, my sister, that thy sorrow hath been sore,
That hath rent thee away from thy kindred and the folk that love thee most:
But to double sorrow with hatred is to cast all after the lost,
And to die and to rest not in death, and to loathe and linger the end:
Now today do we come to this dwelling thy grief and thy woe to amend,
And to give thee the gift that we may; for without thy love and thy peace
Doth our life and our glory sicken, though its outward show increase.
Lo, we bear thee rule and dominion, and hope and the glory of life,
For King Atli wooeth thee, Gudrun, for his queen and his wedded wife."

Still she stood as a carven image, as a stone of ancient days
 When the sun is bright about it and the wind sweeps low o'er the ways.
 All hushed was Gunnar the Niblung and knew not how to beseech,
 But still Hogni faced his sister, nor faltered aught in his speech:
 "Thou art young," he said, "O sister; thou wert called a mighty queen
 When the nurses first upraised thee and first thy body was seen:
 If thou bide with these toiling women when a great king bids thee to wife,
 Then first is it seen of the Niblungs that they cringe and cower from strife:
 By the deeds of the Golden Sigurd I charge thee hinder us not,
 When the Norns have dight the way-beasts, and our hearts for the journey are hot!"

She answered not with speaking, she questioned not with eyes,
 Nought did her deadly anger to her brow unknitted rise,
 Then forth came Grimhild the Mighty, and the cup was in her hand,
 Wherein with the sea's dread mingled was the might and the blood of the land;
 And the guile of the summer serpent and the herb of the sunless dale
 Were blent for the deadening slumber that forgetteth joy and bale;
 And cold words of ancient wisdom that the very Gods would dim
 Were the foreshores of that wine-sea and the cliffs that girt its rim:
 Therewith in the hall stood Grimhild, and cried aloud and spake:

"It was I that bore thee, daughter; I laboured once for thy sake,
 I groaned to bear thee a queen, I sickened sore for thy fame:
 By me and my womb I command thee that thou worship the Niblung name,
 And take the gift we would give thee, and be wed to a king of the earth,
 And rejoice in kings hereafter when thy sons are come to the birth:
 Lo, then as thou lookest upon them, and thinkest of glory to come,
 It shall be as if Sigmund were living, and Sigurd sat in thine home."

Nought answered the white-armed Gudrun, no master of masters might see
 The hate in her soul swift-growing or the rage of her misery.
 But great waxed the wrath of Grimhild; there huge in the hall she stood,
 And her fathers' might stirred in her, and the well-spring of her blood;
 And she cried out blind with anger: "Though all we die on one day,
 Though we live for ever in sorrow, yet shalt thou be given away
 To Atli the King of the mighty, high lord of the Eastland gold:
 Drink now, that my love and my wisdom may thaw thine heart grown cold;
 And take those great gifts of our giving, the cities long builded for thee,
 The wine-burgs digged for thy pleasure, the fateful wealthy lea,
 The darkling woods of the deer, the courts of mighty lords,
 The hosts of men war-shielded, the groves of fallow swords!"

Nought changed the eyes of Gudrun, but she reached her hand to the cup
 And drank before her kindred, and the blood from her heart went up,
 And was blent with the guile of the serpent, and many a thing she forgot,
 But never the day of her sorrow, and of how o'er Sigurd she sat:
 But the land's-folk looked on the Niblungs as the daughter of Giuki drank,
 And before their wrath they trembled, and before their joy they shrank.

Then yet again spake Gudrun, and they that stood thereby,
 —O how their hearts were heavy as though the sun should die!
 She said: "O Kings of my kindred, I shall nought gainsay your will;
 With the fruit of your fond desires your hearts shall ye fulfil;
 Bear me back to the Burg of the Niblungs, and the house of my fathers of old,
 That the men of King Atli may take me with the tokens and treasure of gold."

Then the cry goeth up from the Niblungs, and no while in that house they abide;
 Forth fare the Cloudy People and the stony slopes they ride,
 And the sun is bright behind them o'er queen Thora's lowly dale,

Where the sound of their speech abideth as an ancient woeful tale.
But the Niblungs ride the forest and the dwellings of the deer,
And the wife of the Golden Sigurd to the ancient Burg they bear;
She speaks not of good nor of evil, and no change in her face men see,
Nay, not when the Niblung towers rise up above the lea;
Nay, not when they come to the gateway, and that builded gloom again
Swallows up the steed and its rider, and sword, and gilded wain;
Nay, not when to earth she steppeth, and her feet again pass o'er
The threshold of the Niblungs and the holy house of yore;
Nay, not when alone she lieth in the chamber, on the bed
Where she lay, a little maiden, ere her hope was born and dead:
Yea, how fair is her face on the morrow, how it winneth all people's praise,
As the moon that forebodeth nothing on the night of the last of days.

Nought tarry the lords of King Atli, and the Niblungs stay them nought;
The doors of the treasure are opened and the gold and the tokens are brought;
And all men in the hall are assembled, where Gunnar speaketh and saith:

"Go hence, O men of King Atli, and tell of our love and our faith
To thy master, the mighty of men: go take him this treasure of gold,
And show him how we have hearkened, and nought from his heart may withhold,
Nay, not our best and our dearest, nay, not the crown of our worth,
Our sister, the white-armed Gudrun, the wise and the Queen of the earth."

Then arose the cry of the people, and that Duke of Atli spake:
"We bless thee, O mighty Gunnar, for the Eastland Atli's sake,
And his kingdom as thy kingdom, and his men as thy men shall be,
And the gold in Atli's treasure is stored and gathered for thee."

So spake he amid their shouting, and the Queen from the high-seat stept,
And Gudrun stood with the strangers, and there were women who wept,
But she wept no more than she smiled, nor spake, nor turned again
To that place in the ancient dwelling where once lay Sigurd slain.
But she mounteth the wain all golden, and the Earls to the saddle leap,
And forth they ride in the morning, and adown the builded steep
That hath no name for Gudrun, save the place where Sigurd fell,
The strong abode of treason, the house where murderers dwell.

Three days they ride the lealand till they come to the side of the sea:
Ten days they sail the sea-flood to the land where they would be:
Three days they ride the mirk-wood to the peopled country-side,
Three days through a land of cities and plenteous tilth they ride;
On the fourth the Burg of Atli o'er the meadows riseth up,
And the houses of his dwelling fine-wrought as a silver cup.

Far off in a bight of the mountains by the inner sea it stands,
Turned away from the house of Gudrun, and her kindred and their lands.
Then to right and to left looked Gudrun and beheld the outland folk,
With no love nor hate nor wonder, as out from the teeth she spoke
To that unfamiliar people that had seen not Sigurd's face.
There she saw the walls most mighty as they came to the fenced place:
But lo, by the gate of the city and the entering in of the street
Is an host exceeding glorious, for the King his bride will greet:
So Gudrun stayeth her fellows, and lighteth down from the wain,
And afoot cometh Atli to meet hers and they meet in the midst, they twain,
And he casteth his arms about her as a great man glad at heart;
Nought she smiles, nor her brow is knitted as she draweth aback and apart,
No man could say who beheld her if sorry or glad she were;
But her steady eyes are beholding the King and the Eastland's Fear,

And she thinks: Have I lived too long? how swift doth the world grow worse,
 Though it was but a little season that I slept, forgetting the curse!
 But the King speaks kingly unto her and they pass forth under the gate,
 And she sees he is rich and mighty, though the Niblung folk be great;
 So strong is his house upbuilt, so many are his lords,
 So great the hosts for the murder and the meeting of the swords;
 And she saith: It is surely enough and no further now shall I wend;
 In this house, in the house of a stranger shall be the tale and the end.

Atli biddeth the Niblungs to him.

There now is Gudrun abiding, and gone by is the bloom of her youth,
 And she dwells with a folk untrusty, and a King that knows not ruth:
 Great are his gains in the world, and few men may his might withstand,
 But he weigheth sore on his people and cumpers the hope of his land;
 He craves as the sea-flood craveth, he gripes as the dying hour,
 All folk lie faint before him as he seeketh a soul to devour:
 Like breedeth like in his house, and venom, and guile, and the knife
 Oft lie 'twixt brother and brother, and the son and the father's life:
 As dogs doth Gudrun heed them, and looks with steadfast eyes
 On the guile and base contention, and the strife of murder and lies.

So pass the days and the moons, and the seasons wend on their ways,
 And there as a woman alone she sits mid the glory and praise:
 There oft in the hall she sitteth, and as empty images
 Are grown the shapes of the strangers, till her fathers' hall she sees:
 Void then seems the throne of the King, and no man sits by her side
 In the house of the Cloudy People and the place of her brethren's pride;
 But a dead man lieth before her, and there cometh a voice and a hand,
 And the cloth is plucked from the dead, and, lo, the beloved of the land,
 The righter of wrongs, the deliverer, yea he that gainsayed no grace:
 In a stranger's house is Gudrun and no change comes over her face,
 But her heart cries: Woe, woe, woe, O woe unto me and to all!
 On the fools, on the wise, on the evil let the swift destruction fall!

Cold then is her voice in the high-seat, and she hears not what it saith;
 But Atli heedeth and hearkeneth, for she tells of the Glittering Heath,
 And the Load of the mighty Greyfell, and the Ransom of Odin the Goth:
 Cold yet is her voice as she telleth of murder and breaking of troth,
 Of the stubborn hearts of the Niblungs, and their hands that never yield,
 Of their craving that nought fulfilleth, of their hosts arrayed for the field.
 —What then are the words of King Atli that the cold voice answereth thus?

"King, so shalt thou do, and be sackless of the vengeance that lieth with us:
 What words are these of my brethren, what words are these of my kin?
 For kin upon kin hath pity, and good deeds do brethren win
 For the babes of their mothers' bosoms, and the children of one womb:
 But no man on me had pity, no kings were gathered for doom,
 When I lifted my hands for the pleading in the house of my father's folk;
 When men turned and wrapped them in treason, and did on wrong as a cloak:
 I have neither brethren nor kindred, and I am become thy wife
 To help thine heart to its craving, and strengthen thine hand in the strife."

Thus she stirred up the lust of Atli, she, unmoved as a mighty queen,
 While the fire that burned within her by no child of man was seen.

There oft in the bed she lieth, and beside her Atli sleeps,
 And she seeth him not nor heedeth, for the horror over her creeps,

And her own cry rings through the chamber that along ago she cried,
And a man for his life-breath gasping is struggling by her side,
Yea, who but Sigurd the Volsung; and no man of men in death
Ere spake such words of pity as the words that now he saith,
As the words he speaketh ever while he riseth up on the sword,
The sword of the foster-brethren and the Kings that swore the word.
Lo, there she lieth and hearkeneth if yet he speak again,
And long she lieth hearkening and lieth by the slain.

So dreams the waking Gudrun till the morn comes on apace
And the daylight shines on Atli, and no change comes over her face,
And deep hush lies on the chamber; but loud cries out her heart:
How long, how long, O God-folk, will ye sit alone and apart,
And let the blood of Sigurd cry on you from the earth,
While crowned are the sons of murder with worship and with worth?
If ye tarry shall I tarry? From the darkness of the womb
Came I not in the days passed over for accomplishing your doom?

So she saith till the daylight brightens, and the kingly house is astir,
And she sits by the side of Atli, and a woman's voice doth hear,
One who speaks with the voice of Gudrun, a queenly voice and cold:
"How oft shall I tell thee, Atli, of the wise Andvari's Gold,
The Treasure Regin craved for, the uncounted ruddy rings?
Full surely he that holds it shall rule all earthly kings:
Stretch forth thine hand, O Atli, for the gift is marvellous great,
And I am she that giveth! how long wilt thou linger and wait
Till the traitors come against thee with the war-torch and the steel,
And here in thy land thou perish, befooled of thy kingly weal?
Have I wedded the King of the Eastlands, the master of numberless swords,
Or a serving-man of the Niblungs, a thrall of the Westland lords?"

So spake the voice of Gudrun; suchwise she cast the seed
O'er the gold-lust of King Atli for the day of the Niblungs' Need.

Who is this in the hall of King Gunnar, this golden-gleaming man?
Who is this, the bright and the silent as the frosty eve and wan,
Round whom the speech of wise-ones lies hid in bonds of fear?
Who this in the Niblung feast-hall as the moon-rise draweth anear?

Hark! his voice mid the glittering benches and the wine-cups of the Earls,
As cold as the wind that bloweth where the winter river whirls,
And the winter sun forgetteth all the promise of the spring;
"Hear ye, O men of the Westlands, hear thou, O Westland King,
I have ridden the scorching highways, I have ridden the mirk-wood blind,
I have sailed the weltering ocean your Westland house to find;
For I am the man called Knefrud with Atli's word in my mouth.
That saith: O noble Gunnar, come thou and be glad in the south,
And rejoice with Eastland warriors; for the feast for thee is dight,
And the cloths for thy coming fashioned my glorious hall make bright.
Knowst thou not how the sun of the heavens hangs there 'twixt floor and roof.
How the light of the lamp all golden holds dusky night aloof?
How the red wine runs like a river, and the white wine springs as a well,
And the harps are never ceasing of ancient deeds to tell?
Thou shalt come when thy heart desireth, when thou weariest thou shalt go,
And shalt say that no such high-tide the world shall ever know.
Come bare and bald as the desert, and leave mine house again
As rich as the summer wine-burg, and the ancient wheat-sown plain!
Come, bid thy men be building thy store-house greater yet,
And make wide thy stall and thy stable for the gifts thine hand shall get!

Yet when thou art gone from Atli he shall stand by his treasure of gold,
 He shall look through stall and stable, he shall ride by field and fold,
 And no ounce from the weight shall be lacking, of his beasts shall lack no head,
 If no thief hath stolen from Gunnar, if no beast in his land lie dead.
 Yea henceforth let our lives be as one, let our wars and our wayfarings blend,
 That my name with thine may be told of when the song is sung in the end,
 That the ancient war-spent Atli may sit and laugh with delight
 O'er thy feet the swift in battle, o'er thine hand uplifted to smite."

So spake the guileful Knefrud mid the silence of the wise,
 Nor once his cold voice faltered, nor once he sank his eyes:

Then spake the glorious Gunnar:

"We hear King Atli's voice.

And the heart is glad within us that he biddeth us rejoice:

Yet the thing shall be seen but seldom that a Niblung fares from his land

With eyes by the gold-lust blinded, with the greedy griping hand.

When thou farest aback unto Atli, thou shalt tell him how thou hast been

In the house of the Westland Gunnar, and what things thine eyes have seen:

Thou shalt tell of the seven store-houses with swords filled through and through,

Gold-hilted, deftly smithied, in the Southland wave made blue:

Thou shalt tell of the house of the treasures and the Gold that lay erewhile

On the Glittering Heath of murder 'neath the heart of the Serpent's guile:

Thou shalt note our glittering hauberk, thou shalt strive to bend our bow,

Thou shalt look on the shield of Gunnar that its white face thou mayst know:

Thou shalt back the Niblung war-steed when the west wind blows its most,

And see if it over-run thee; thou shalt gaze on the Niblung host

And be glad of the friends of Atli; thou shalt fare through stable and stall,

And tell over the tale of the beast-kind, if the night forbear to fall;

Through the horse-mead shalt thou wander, through the meadows of the sheep,

But forbear to count their thousands lest thou weary for thy sleep;

Thou shalt look if the barns be empty, though the wheat-field whiteneth now,

In the midmost of the summer in the fields men cared to plough;

Thou shalt dwell with men that lack not, and the tillers fair and fain;

Thou shalt see, and long, and wonder, and tell thy King of his gain;

For in all that here thou beholdest hath he portion even as we;

Sweet bloometh his love in our midmost, and the fair time yet may be,

When we twain shall meet and be merry; and sure when our lives are done

No more shall men sunder our glory than the Gods have rent the sun.

Sit, mighty man, and be joyous: and then shalt thou cast us a word

And say how fareth our sister mid the glory of her lord."

Then Knefrud looked upon Gunnar, and spake, nor sank his eyes:

"Each morn at the day's beginning when the sun hath hope to arise

She looketh from Atli's tower toward the west part and the grey,

To see the Niblung spear-heads gleam down the lonely way:

Each eve at the day's departing on the topmost tower she stands,

And looketh toward the mirk-wood and the sea of the western lands:

There long in the wind she standeth, and the even grown acold,

To see the Niblung war-shields come forth from out the wold."

Then Gunnar turneth to Hogni, and he saith: "O glorious lord,

What saith thine heart to the bidding, and Atli's loving word?"

"I have done many deeds," said Hogni, "I have worn the smooth and the rough,

While the Gods looked on from heaven, and belike I have done enough,

And no deed for me abideth, but rather the sleep and the rest

But thou, O Son of King Giuki, art our eldest and our best,

And fair lie the fields before thee wherein thine hand shall work:

By the wayside of the greedy doth many a peril lurk;
Full wise is the great one meseemeth who bideth his ending at home
When the winds and the waves may be dealing with hate that hath far to come.“

”I hearken thy word,“ said Gunnar, ”and I know in very deed
That long-lived and happy are most men that hearken Hogni’s rede.
Hear thou, O Eastland War-god, and bear this answer aback,
That nought may the earth of my people King Giuki’s children lack,
And that here in the land am I biding till the Norns my life shall change;
Howbeit, if here were Atli, his face were scarce more strange
Than that daughter of my father whom sore I long to see:
Let him come, and sit with the Niblungs, and be called their king with me.“

Then spake the guileful Knefrud, and his word was exceeding proud:
”It is little the wont of Atli to sit at meat with a crowd;
Yet know, O Westland Warrior, that thy message shall be done.
Since the Cloudy Folk make ready new lodging for the sun.“

He laughed, and the wise kept silence, and Gunnar heeded him nought:
On the daughter of his people was set the Niblung’s thought,
So sore he longed to behold her; for his life seemed wearing away,
And the wealth and the fame he had gathered seemed nought by the earlier day,
The day of love departed, and of hope forgotten long.

But Hogni laughs with the stranger, and cries out for harp and song,
And the glee rises up as a river when the mountain-tops grow clear,
When seaward drift the rain-clouds, and the end of day is near;
As of birds in the green groves singing is the Niblung manhood’s voice,
And the Earls without foreboding in their mighty life rejoice.
Glad then grows the King of the people, and the sweetness filleth his heart,
And he turneth about a little, and speaketh to Knefrud apart:
”What sayest thou, lord of the Eastland, how with Gudrun’s heart it fares?
Is she sunk in the day of dominion and the burden that it bears,
Or remembereth she her brethren and her father and her folk?“

Then Knefrud looked upon Gunnar, and forth from the teeth he spoke:
”It is e’en as I said, King Gunnar: all eves she stands by the gate
The coming of her kindred through the dusky tide to wait:
Each day in the dawn she ariseth, and saith the time is at hand
When the feet of the Niblung War-Kings shall tread King Atli’s land:
Then she praiseth the wings of the dove, and the wings of the wayfaring crane
’Gainst whom the wind prevails not, and the tempest driveth in vain;
And she praiseth the waves of the ocean, how they toil and toil and blend,
Till they break on the strand belovèd, and the Niblung earth in the end.“

He spake, and the song rose upward and the wine of Kings was poured,
And Gunnar heard in the wall-nook how the wind went forth abroad,
And he dreamed, and beheld the ocean, and all kingdoms of the earth,
And the world lay fair before him and his worship and his worth.

Then again spake the Eastland liar: ”O King, I may not hide
That great things in the land of Atli thy mighty soul abide;
For the King is spent and war-weak, nor rejoiceth more in strife;
And his sons, the children of Gudrun, now look their first on life:
For this end meseems is his bidding, that no worser men than ye
May sit in the throne of Atli and the place where he wont to be.“

In the tuneful hall of the Niblungs that Eastland liar spake,
And he heard the song of the mighty o’er Gunnar’s musing break,
And his cold heart gladdened within him as man cried out to man,
And fair ’twixt horn and beaker the red wine bubbled and ran.

At last spake Gunnar the Niblung as his hand on the cup he laid:
 "A great king craveth our coming, and no more shall he be gainsayed:
 We will go to look on Atli, though the Gods and the Goths forbid;
 Nought worse than death meseemeth on the Niblungs' path is hid,
 And this shall the high Gods see to, but I to the Niblung name,
 And the day of deeds to accomplish, and the gathering-in of fame."

Up he stood with the bowl in his right-hand, and mighty and great he was,
 And he cried: "Now let the beakers adown the benches pass;
 Let us drink dear draughts and glorious, though the last farewell it be,
 And this draught that I drink have sundered my father's house and me."

He drank, and all men drank with him, and the hearts of the Earls arose,
 As of them that snatch forth glory from the deadly wall of foes:
 With the joy of life were they drunken and no man knew for why,
 And the voice of their exultation rose up in an awful cry;
 —It is joy in the mouths that utter, it is hope in the hearts that crave,
 And think of no gainsaying, and remember nought to save;
 But without the women hearken, and the hearts within them sink;
 And they say: What then betideth that our lords forbear to drink,
 And wail and weep in the night-tide and cry the Gods to aid?
 Why then are the Kings tormented, and the warriors' hearts afraid?

Then the deadened sound sweeps landward, and the hearts of the field-folk fail,
 And they say: Is there death in the Burg, that thence goeth the cry and the wail?
 Lo, lo, the feast-hall's windows! blood-red through the dark they shine:
 Why is weeping the song of the Niblungs, and blood the warrior's wine?

But therein are the torches tossing, and the shields of men upborne,
 And the death-blades yet unbloodied cast up 'twixt bowl and horn,
 And all rest of heart is departed as men speak of the mirk-wood's ways,
 And the fame of outland countries, and the green sea's troublous days.

But Gunnar arose o'er the people, as a mighty King he spake:
 "O ye of the house of Giuki that are joyous for my sake,
 What then shall be left to the Niblungs if we return no more?
 Then let the wolves be warders of the Niblungs' gathered store!
 On the hearth let the worm creep over where the fire now flares aloft!
 And the adder coil in the chambers where the Niblung wives sleep soft!
 Let the master of the pine-wood roll huge in the Niblung porch,
 And the moon through the broken rafters be the Niblungs' feastful torch!"

Glad they cried on the glorious Gunnar; for they saw the love in his eyes,
 And with joy and wine were they drunken, and his words passed over the wise,
 As oft o'er the garden lilies goes the rising thunder-wind,
 And they know no other summer, and no spring that was they mind.

But Hogni speaketh to Knefrud: "Lo, Gunnar's word is said:
 How fares it, lord, with Gudrun? remembereth she the dead?"

Then the liar laughed out and answered: "Ye shall go tomorrow morn;
 The man to turn back Gunnar shall never now be born:
 Each day-spring the white Gudrun on Sigurd's glory cries,
 All eves she wails on Sigurd when the fair sun sinks and dies!"

"Thou sayest sooth," said Hogni, "one day we twain shall wend
 To the gate of the Eastland Atli, that our tale may have an end.
 Long time have I looked for the journey, and marvelled at the day,
 With what eyes I shall look on Sigurd, what words his mouth shall say."

Then he raiseth the cup for Gunnar, and men see his glad face shine
 As he crieth hail and glory o'er the bubbles of the wine;

And they drink to the lives of the brethren, and men of the latter earth
May not think of the height of their hall-glee, or measure out their mirth:
So they feast in the undark even to the midmost of the night.
Till at last, with sleep unwearied, they weary with delight,
And pass forth to the beds blue-covered, and leave the hearth acold:
They sleep; in the hall grown silent scarce glimmereth now the gold:
For the moon from the world is departed, and grey clouds draw across,
To hide the dawn's first promise and deepen earthly loss.
The lone night draws to its death, and never another shall fall
On those sons of the feastful warriors in the Niblungs' holy hall.

How the Niblungs fare to the Land of King Atli.

Now when the house was silent, and all men in slumber lay,
And yet two hours were lacking of the dawning-tide of day,
The sons of his foster-mother doth the heart-wise Hogni find;
In the dead night, speaking softly, he showeth them his mind,
And they wake and hearken and heed him, and arise from the bolster blue,
Nor aught do their stout hearts falter at the deed he bids them do.
So he and they go softly while all men slumber and sleep,
And they enter the treasure-houses, and come to their midmost heap;
But so rich in the night it glimmers that the brethren hold their breath,
While Hogni laugheth upon it:—long it lay on the Glittering Heath,
Long it lay in the house of Reidmar, long it lay 'neath the waters wan;
But no long while hath it tarried in the houses and dwellings of man.
Nor long these linger before it; they set their hands to the toil,
And uplift the Bed of the Serpent, the Seed of murder and broil;
No word they speak in their labour, but bear out load on load
To great wains that out in the fore-court for the coming Gold abode:
Most huge were the men, far mightier than the mightiest fashioned now,
But the salt sweat dimmed their eyesight and flooded cheek and brow
Ere half the work was accomplished; and by then the laden wains
Came groaning forth from the gateway, dawn drew on o'er the plains;
And the ramparts of the people, those walls high-built of old,
Stood grey as the bones of a battle in a dale few folk behold:
But in haste they goad the yoke-beasts, and press on and make no speech,
Though the hearts are proud within them and their eyes laugh each at each.
No great way down from the burg-gate, anigh to the hallowed field,
There lieth a lake in the river as round as Odin's shield,
A black pool huge and awful: ten long-ships of the most
Therein might wager battle, and the sunken should be lost
Beyond all hope of diver, yea, beyond the plunging lead;
On either side its rock-walls rise up to a mighty head,
But by green slopes from the meadows 'tis easy drawing near
To the brow whence the dark-grey rampart to the water goeth sheer:
'Tis as if the Niblung River had cleft the grave-mound through
Of the mightiest of all Giants ere the Gods' work was to do;
And indeed men well might deem it, that fearful sights lie hid
Beneath the unfathomed waters, the place to all forbid;
No stream the black deep showeth, few winds may search its face,
And the silver-scaled sea-farers love nought its barren space.
There now the Niblung War-king and the foster-brethren twain
Lead up their golden harvest and stay it wain by wain,
Till they hang o'er the rim scarce balanced: no glance they cast below

To the black and awful waters well known from long ago,
 But they cut the yoke-beasts' traces, and drive them down the slopes,
 Who rush through the widening daylight, and bellow forth their hopes
 Of the straw-stall and the barley: but the Niblungs turn once more,
 Hard toil the warrior cart-carles for the garnering of their store,
 And shoulder on the wain-wheels o'er the edge of the grimly wall,
 And stand upright to behold it, how the waggons plunge and fall.
 Down then and whirling outward the ruddy Gold fell forth,
 As a flame in the dim grey morning, flashed out a kingdom's worth,
 Then the waters, roared above it, the wan water and the foam
 Flew up o'er the face of the rock-wall as the tinkling Gold fell home,
 Unheard, unseen for ever, a wonder and a tale,
 Till the last of earthly singers from, the sons of men shall fail:
 Then the face of the further waters a widening ripple rent
 And forth from hollow places strange sounds as of talking went,
 And loud laughed Hogni in answer; but not so long he stayed
 As that half the oily ripple in long sleepy coils was laid,
 Or the lapping fallen silent in the water-beaten caves;
 Scarce streamward yet were drifting the foam-heaps o'er the waves.
 When betwixt the foster-brethren down the slopes King Hogni strode
 Toward the ancient Burg of his fathers, as a man that casteth a load:
 No word those fellows had spoken since he whispered low and light
 O'er the beds of the foster-brethren in the dead hour of the night,
 But his face was proud and glorious as he strode the war-gate through,
 And went up to his kingly chamber, and the golden bed he knew,
 And lay down and slept by his help-mate as a play-spent child might sleep
 In some franklin's wealthy homestead, in the room the nurses keep.
 Nought the sun on that morn delayeth, but light o'er the world's face flies.
 And awake by the side of King Hogni the wedded woman lies,
 And her bosom is weary with sighing, and her eyes with dream-born tears.
 And a sound as of all confusion is ever in her ears:
 Then she turneth and crieth to Hogni, as she layeth a hand on his breast;
 "Wake, wake, thou son of Giuki! save thy speech-friend all unrest!"
 Then he waketh up as a child that hath slept in the summer grass,
 And he saith: "What tidings, O Bera, what tidings come to pass?"
 She saith, "Wilt thou wend with Gunnar to Atli over the main?"
 Said Hogni: "Hast thou not heard it, how rich we shall come again?"
 "Ye shall never come back," said Bera, "ye shall die by the inner sea."
 "Yea, here or there," said Hogni, "my death no doubt shall be."
 "O Hogni," she said, "forbear it, that snare of the Eastland wrong!
 In the health and the wealth of the sunlight at home mayst thou tarry for long:
 For waking or sleeping I dreamed, and dreaming, the tokens I saw."
 "Oft," he said, "in the hands of the house-wife comes the crock by its fatal flaw:
 An hundred earls shall slay me, or the fleeing night-thief's shaft,
 The sickness that wasteth cities, or the unstrained summer draught:
 Now as mighty shall be King Atli and the gathered Eastland force
 As the fly in the wine desired, or the weary stumbling horse."
 She said: "Wilt thou stay in the land, lest the noble faint and fail,
 And the Gods have nought to tell of in the ending of the tale?
 O King, save thou thine hand-maid, lest the bloom of Kings decay!"
 He said: "Good yet were the earth, though all we should die in a day:
 But so fares it with you, ye women: when your husband or brother shall die,
 Ye deem that the world shall perish, and the race of man go by."

"Sure then is thy death," she answered, "for I saw the Eastland flood
Break over the Burg of the Niblungs, and fill the hall with blood."

He said: "Shall we wade the meadows to the feast of Atli the King?
Then the blood-red blossoming sorrel about our legs shall cling."

Said Bera: "I saw thee coming with the face of other days;
But the flame was in thy raiment, and thy kingly cloak was ablaze."

"How else," said he, "O woman, wouldst thou have a Niblung stride,
Save in ruddy gold sun-lighted, through the house of Atli's pride?"

She said: "I beheld King Atli midst the place of sacrifice
And the holy grove of the Eastland in a king's most hallowed guise:
Then I looked, as with laughter triumphant he laid his gift in the fire,
And lo, 'twas the heart of Hogni, and the heart of my desire;
But he turned and looked upon me as I sickened with fear and with love,
And I saw the guile of the greedy, and with speechless sleep I strove,
And had cried out curses against him, but my gaping throat was hushed,
Till the light of a deedless dawning o'er dream and terror rushed;
And there wert thou lying beside me, though but little joy it seemed,
For thou wert but an image unstable of the days before I dreamed."

Quoth Hogni, "Shall I arede it? Seems it not meet to thee
That the heart and the love of the Niblungs in Atli's hand should be,
When he stands by the high Gods' altars, and uplifts his heart for the tide
When the kings of the world-great people to the Eastland house shall ride?
Nay, Bera, wilt thou be weeping? but parting-fear is this;
Doubt not we shall come back happy from the house of Atli's bliss:
At least, when a king's hand offers all honour and great weal,
Wouldst thou have me strive to unclasp it to show the hidden steel?
With evil will I meet evil when it draweth exceeding near;
But oft have I heard of evil, whose father was but fear,
And his mother lust of living, and nought will I deal with it,
Lest the past, and those deeds of my doing be as straw when the fire is lit.
Lo now, O Daughter of Kings, let us rise in the face of the day,
And be glad in the summer morning when the kindred ride on their way;
For tears beseem not king-folk, nor a heart made dull with dreams,
But to hope, if thou mayst, for ever, and to fear nought, well beseems."

There the talk falls down between them, and they rise in the morn, they twain,
And bright-faced wend through the dwelling of the Niblungs' glory and gain.

Meanwhile awakeneth Gunnar, and looks on the wife by his side,
And saith: "Why weepest thou, Glaumvor, what evil now shall betide?"

She said: "I was waking and dreamed, or I slept and saw the truth;
The Norns are hooded and angry, and the Gods have forgotten their ruth."

"Speak, sweet-mouthed woman," said Gunnar, "if the Norns are hard, I am kind;
Though even the King of the Niblungs may loose not where they bind."

She said: "Wilt thou go unto Atli and enter the Burg of the East?
Wilt thou leave the house of the faithful, and turn to the murderer's feast?"

"It is e'en as certain," said Gunnar, "as though I knocked at his gate,
If the winds and waters stay not, or death, or the dealings of Fate."

"Woe worth the while!" said Glaumvor, "then I talk with the dead indeed:
And why must I tarry behind thee afar from the Niblungs' Need?"

He said: "Thou wert heavy-hearted last night for the parting-tide;
And alone in the dreamy country thy soul would needs abide,
And see not the King that loves thee, nor remember the might of his hand;
So thou fallest a prey unholpen to the lies of the dreamy land."

"Ah, would they were lies," said Glaumvor, "for not the worst was this:
There thou wert in the holy high-seat mid the heart of the Niblung bliss,
And a sword was borne into our midmost, and its point and its edge were red,
And at either end the wood-wolves howled out in the day of dread;
With that sword wert thou smitten, O Gunnar, and the sharp point pierced thee through.
And the kin were all departed, and no face of man I knew:
Then I strove to flee and might not; for day grew dark and strange,
And no moonrise and no morning the eyeless mirk would change."

"Such are dreams of the night," said Gunnar, "that lovers oft perplex,
When the sundering hour is coming with the cares that entangle and vex.
Yet if there be more, fair woman, when a king speaks loving words,
May I cast back words of anger, and the threat of grinded swords?"

"O yet wouldst thou tarry," said Glaumvor, "in the fair sun-lighted day!
Nor give thy wife to another, nor cast thy kingdom away."

"Of what king of the people," said Gunnar, "hast thou known it written or told,
That the word was born in the even which the morrow should withhold?"

"Alas, alas!" said Glaumvor, "then all is over and done!
For I dreamed of the hall of the Niblungs at the setting of the sun,
How dead women came in thither no worse than queens arrayed,
Who passed by the earls of the Niblungs, and their hands on thy gown-skirt laid,
And hailed thee fair for their fellow, and bade thee come to their hall.
O bethink thee, King of the Niblungs, what tidings shall befall!"

"Yea, shall they befall?" said Gunnar, "then who am I to strive
Against the change of my life-days, while the Gods on high are alive?
I shall ride as my heart would have me; let the Gods bestir them then,
And raise up another people in the stead of the Niblung men:
But at home shalt thou sit, King's Daughter, in the keeping of the Fates,
And be blithe with the men of thy people and the guest within thy gates,
Till thou know of our glad returning to the holy house and dear
Or the fall of Giuki's children, and a tale that all shall hear.
Arise and do on gladness, lest the clouds roll on and lower
O'er the heavy hearts of the people in the Niblungs' parting hour."

So he spake, and his love rejoiced her, and they rose in the face of the day,
And no seeming shadow of evil on those bright-eyed King-folk lay.

Thus stirreth the house of the Niblungs, and awakeneth unto life;
And were there any envy, or doubt that breedeth strife,
'Twixt friends or kin or brethren, 'twas healed that self-same morn,
And peace and loving-kindness o'er all the house was borne,

Now arrayed are the earls and the warriors, and into the hall they come
When the morning sun is shining through the heart of their ancient home;
And lo, how the allwise Grimhild is set in the golden seat,
The first of the way-fain warriors, and the first of the wives to greet;
In the raiment of old she sitteth, aloft in the kingly place,
And all men marvel to see her and the glory of her face.

So all is dight for departing and the helms of the Niblung lords
Shine close as a river of fire o'er the hilts of hidden swords:
About and around are the women; and who e'er hath been heavy of heart,
If their hearts are light this morning when their fairest shall depart?
They hear the steeds in the forecourt; from the rampart of the wall
Comes the cry and noise of the warders as man to man doth call;
For the young give place to the old, and the strong carles labour to show
The last-learned craft of battle to their fathers ere they go.
There is mocking and mirth and laughter as men tell to the ancient sires

Of the four-sheared shaft of the gathering, and the horn, and the beaconing fires.
Woe's me! but the women laugh not: do they hope that the sun may be stayed,
And the journey of the Niblungs a little while delayed?
Or is not their hope the rather, that they do but dream in the night,
And that they shall awake in a little with the land's life faring aright?
Ah, fair and fresh is the morning as ever a season hath been,
And the nourishing sun shines glorious on the toil of carle and quean,
And the wealth of the land desired, and all things are alive and awake;
Let them wait till the even bringeth sweet rest for hearts that ache.

Lo now, a stir by the doorway, and men see how great and grand
Come the Kings of Giuki begotten, all-armed, and hand in hand:
Where then shall the world behold them, such champions clad in steel,
Such hearts so free and bounteous, so wise for the people's weal?
Where then shall the world see such-like, if these must die as the mean,
And fall as lowly people, and their days be no more seen?
They go forth fair and softly as they wend to the seat of the Kings,
And they smile in their loving-kindness as they talk of bygone things.
Are they not as the children of Giuki, that fared afield erewhile
In hope without contention, mid the youth that knew no guile?
Their wedded wives are beside them with faces proud and fair,
That smile, if the lips smile only, for the Eastland liar is there.
Fain the women are of those Brethren, and they seem so gay and kind,
That again the hope upspringeth of their lords abiding behind.

But Hogni spake to his brother, and they looked on the liar's son,
And clear ran King Gunnar's laughter as the summer waters run;
Then the Queens' hearts fainted within them, and with pain they drew their breath;
For they knew that the King was merry and laughed in the face of death.

Fair now on the ancient high-seat, and the heart of the Niblung pride,
Stand those lovely lords of Giuki with their wedded wives beside.
And Gunnar cries: "O maidens, let the cup be in every hand,
For this morn for a little season we leave our fathers' land,
And love we leave behind us, and love abroad we bear,
And these twain shall meet in a little, and their meeting-tide be fair:
Rejoice, O Niblung children, be glad o'er the parting cup!
For meseems if the heavens were falling, our spears should hold them up."

Then he leaped adown from the high-seat and amidst his men he stood,
And the very joy of God-folk ran through the Niblung blood,
And the glee of them that die not: there they drink in their mighty hall,
And glad on the ancient fathers, and the sons of God they call:
The hope of their hearts goes upward in the last most awful voice,
And once more the quivering timbers of the Niblung home rejoice.

But exceeding proud sits Grimhild, and so wondrous is her state
That men deem they have never seen her so glorious and so great,
And she speaks, when again in the feast-hall is there silence save of the mail
And the whispered voice of women, as they tell their latest tale:

"Go forth, O Kings, to dominion, and the crown of all your might,
And the tale from of old foreordered ere the day was begotten of night.
For all this is the work of the Norns, though ye leave a woman behind
Who hath toiled and toiled in the darkness, the road of fate to find:
Go glad, O children of Giuki; though scarce ye wot indeed
Of the labour of your mother to win your glory's meed.
Farewell, farewell, O children, till ye get you back again
To her that bore you in darkness, and brought you forth in pain!

Cast wide the doors for the King-folk, ring out O harpstrings now!
 For the best e'er born of woman go forth with cloudless brow.
 Be glad O ancient lintel, O threshold of the door,
 For such another parting shall earth behold no more!"

She ceased, and no voice gave answer save the voice of smitten harps,
 As the hands of the music-weavers went o'er their golden warps;
 Then high o'er the warriors towering, as the king-leek o'er the grass,
 Out into the world of sunlight through the door those Brethren pass,
 And all the host of the warriors, the women's silent woe,
 The steel and the feet soft-falling o'er the ancient threshold go,
 While all alone on the high-seat the god-born Grimhild sits:
 There hearkeneth she steeds' neighing, and the champing of the bits,
 And the clash of steel-clad champions, as at last they leap aloft,
 And cries and women's weeping 'mid the music breathing soft;
 Then the clattering of the horse-hoofs, and the echo of the gate
 With the wakened sword-song singing o'er departure of the great,
 Till the many mingled voices are swallowed up and stilled,
 And all the air by seeming with an awful sound is filled,
 The cry of the Niblung trumpet, as men reach the unvalled space:
 So whiles in a mighty city, and a many-peopled place,
 When the rain falls down 'mid the babble, nor ceaseth rattle of wheels,
 And with din of wedding joy-bells the minster steeple reels,
 Lo, God sends down his thunder, and all else is hushed as then,
 And it is as the world's beginning, and before the birth of men.

Long sitteth the god-born Grimhild till all is silent there,
 For afar down the meadows with the host all people fare;
 Then bitter groweth her visage, in the hush she crieth and saith:

"O ye—whom then shall I cry on, ye that hunt my sons unto death,
 And overthrow our glory, and bring our labour to nought—
 Ye Gods, ye had fashioned the greatest, and to make them greater I wrought,
 And to strengthen your hands for the battle, and uplift your hearts for the end:
 But ye, ye have fashioned confusion, and the great with the little ye blend,
 Till no more on the earth shall be living the mighty that mock at your death,
 Till like the leaves men tremble, like the dry leaves quake at a breath.
 I have wrought for your lives and your glory, and for this have I strengthened my guile,
 That the earth your hands uplifted might endure, nor pass in a while
 Like the clouds of latter morning that melt in the first of the night."

She rose up great and dreadful, and stood on the floor upright,
 And cast up her hands to the roof-tree, and cried aloud and said:

"Woe to you that have made me for nothing! for the house of the Niblungs is dead,
 Empty and dead as the desert, where the sun is idle and vain
 And no hope hath the dew to cherish, and no deed abideth the rain!"

She falleth aback in the high seat, and the eagles cry from aloof,
 While Grimhild's eyes wide-open stare up at the Niblung roof:
 But they see not, nought are they doing to feed her fear or desire;
 And her heart, the forge of sorrow, dead, cold, is its baneful fire;
 And her cunning hand is helpless, for her hopeless soul is gone;
 Far off belike it drifteth from the waste her labour won.

Fair now through midmost ocean King Gunnar's dragons run,
 And the green hills round about them gleam glorious with the sun;
 The keels roll down the sea-dale, and welter up the steep,
 And o'er the brow hang quivering ere again they take the leap;
 For the west wind pipes behind them, and no land is on their lea,

As the mightiest of earth's peoples sails down the summer sea:
 And as eager as the west-wind, no duller than the foam
 They spread all sails to the breezes, and seek their glory home:
 Six days they sail the sea-flood, and the seventh dawn of day
 Up-heaveth a new country, a land far-off and grey;
 Then Knefrud biddeth heed it, and he saith: "Lo, the Eastland shore,
 And the land few ships have sailed to, by the mirk-wood covered o'er."
 Then riseth the cry and the shouting as the golden beaks they turn,
 For all hearts for the land of cities, and the hall of Atli yearn:
 But a little after the noontide is the Niblung host embayed,
 And betwixt the sheltering nesses the ocean-wind is laid:
 No whit they brook delaying: but their noblest and their best
 Toss up the shaven oar-blades, and toil and mock at rest:
 Full swift they skim the swan-mead till the tall masts quake and reel,
 And the oaken sea-burges quiver from bulwark unto keel.
 It is Gunnar goes the foremost with the tiller in his hand,
 And beside him standeth Knefrud and laughs on Atli's land:
 And so fair are the dragons driven, that by ending of the day
 On the beach by the ebb left naked the sea-beat keels they lay:
 Then they look aloft from the foreshore, and lo, King Atli's steeds
 On the brow of the mirk-wood standing, well dight for the warriors' needs,
 The red and the roan together, and the dapple-grey and the black;
 Nor bits nor silken bridles, nor golden cloths they lack,
 And the horse-lads of King Atli with that horse-array are blent,
 And their shout of salutation o'er the oozy sand is sent:
 Then no more will the Niblungs tarry when they see that ready band
 But they leap adown from the long-ships, and waist-deep they wade the strand,
 And they in their armour of onset, beshielded, and sword by the side,
 E'en as men returning homeward to their loves and their friends that abide.
 The first of all goeth Gunnar, and Hogni the wise cometh after,
 And wringeth the sea from his kirtle; and all men hearken his laughter,
 As his feet on the earth stand firm, and the sun in the west goeth down,
 And the Niblungs stand on the foreshore 'twixt the sea and the mirk-wood brown.
 For no meat there they linger, and they tarry for no sleep,
 But aloft to the golden saddles those Giuki's children leap,
 And forth from the side of the sea-flood they ride the mirk-wood's ways,
 Loud then is the voice of King Hogni and he sets forth Atli's praise,
 As they ride through the night of the tree-boughs till the earthly night prevails,
 And along the desert sea-strand the wind of ocean wails.
 There none hath tethered the dragons, or inboard handled the oars,
 And the tide of the sea cometh creeping along the stranger-shores,
 Till those golden dragons are floated, and their unmanned oars awash
 In the sandy waves of the shallows, from stem to tiller clash:
 Then setteth a wind from the shore, and the night is waxen a-cold,
 And seaward drift the long-ships with their raiment and vessels of gold,
 And their Gods with mastery carven: and who knoweth the story to tell,
 If their wrack came ever to shoreward in some place where fishers dwell,
 Or sank in midmost ocean, and lay on the sea-floor wan
 Where the pale sea-goddess singeth o'er the bane of many a man?

Atli speaketh with the Niblungs.

Three days the Niblung warriors the ways of the mirk-wood ride
 Till they come to a land of cities and the peopled country-side,

And the land's-folk run from their labour, and the merchants throng the street
 And the lords of many a city the stranger kings would meet.
 But nought will the Niblungs tarry; swift through Atli's weal they wend,
 For their hearts are exceeding eager for their journey's latter end.
 Three days they ride that country, and many a city leave,
 But the fourth dawn mighty mountains by the inner sea upheave.
 Then they ride a little further, and Atli's burg they see
 With the feet of the mountains mingled above the flowery lea,
 And yet a little further, and lo, its long white wall,
 And its high-built guarded gateways, and its towers o'erhung and tall;
 And ever all along them the glittering spear-heads run,
 As the sparks of the white wood-ashes when the cooking-fire is done.

Then they look to the right and the left hand, and see no folk astir,
 And no reek from the homestead chimneys; and no toil of men they hear:
 But the hook hangs lone in the vineyard, and the scythe is lone in the hay,
 The bucket thirsts by the well-side, the void cart cumber the way.
 Then doubt on the war-host falleth, and they think: Well were we then,
 When once we rode in the Westland and saw the brown-faced men
 Peer through the hawthorn hedges as the Niblung host went by.
 Yet they laugh and make no semblance of any fear drawn nigh.
 Yea, Knefrud looked upon them, and with chilly voice he spake:

"Now his guests doth Atli honour, and yet more will he do for your sake,
 Who hath hidden all his people, and holdeth his vassals at home
 On the day that the mighty Niblungs adown his highway come,
 Lest men fear as the finders of Gods, and tremble and cumber the ways,
 And the voice of the singers fail them to sing of the Niblungs' praise."

Men laughed as his voice they hearkened, and none bade turn again,
 But the swords in the scabbards rattled as they rode with loosened rein.

Now they ride in the Burg-gate's shadow from out the sunlit fields,
 Till the spears aloft are hidden and Atli's painted shields;
 And no captain cries from the rampart, nor soundeth any horn,
 And the doors of oak and iron are shut this merry morn:
 Then the Niblungs leap from the saddle, and the threats of earls arise,
 And the wrath of Kings' defenders is waxing in their eyes;
 But Knefrud looketh and laugheth, and he saith:

"So is Atli fain

Of the glory of the Niblungs and their honour's utmost gain:
 By no feet but yours this morning will he have his threshold trod,
 Nay, not by the world's most glorious, nay not by a wandering God."

Then Hogni looked on Knefrud as the bodily death shall gaze
 On the last of the Kings of men-folk in the last of the latter days,
 And he caught a staff from his saddle, a mighty axe of war,
 And stood most huge of all men in face of Atli's door,
 And upreared the axe against it with such wondrous strokes and great,
 That the iron-knitted marvel hung shattered in the gate:
 Through the rent poured the Niblung children, and in Atli's burg they stood;
 With none to bid them welcome, or ask them what they would.

But Hogni turned upon Knefrud, and spake: "I said, time was,
 That we twain should ride out hither to bring a deed to pass:
 And now one more deed abideth, and then no more for thee,
 And another and another, and no more deeds for me."

'Gainst the liar's eyes one moment flashed out the axe-head's sheen,
 And then was the face of Knefrud as though it ne'er had been,

And his gay-clad corpse lay glittering on the causeway in the sun.
No man cried out on Hogni or asked of the deed so done,
But their shielded ranks they marshalled and through Atli's burg they strode:
There they see the merchant's dwelling, the rich man's fair abode,
The halls of doom, and the market, the loom and the smithying-booth,
The stall for the wares of the outlands, the temples high and smooth:
But all is hushed and empty, and no child of man they meet
As they thread the city's tangle, and enter street on street,
And leave the last forgotten, and of the next know nought.

So through the silent city by the Norns their feet are brought,
Till lo, on a hill's uprising a huge house they behold,
And a hall with gates all brazen, and roof of ruddy gold:
Then they know the house of Atli, and they trow that sooth it is
That the Lord of such a dwelling may give his guest-folk bliss:
Then they loosen the swords in their scabbards, and upraise a mighty shout,
And the trumpet of the Niblungs through the lonely street rings out
And stilleth the wind in the wall-nook: but hark, as its echoes die,
How forth from that hall of the Eastlands comes the sound of minstrelsy,
And the brazen doors swing open: but the Niblungs are at the door,
And the bidden guests of Atli o'er the fateful threshold pour;
There the music faileth before them, till its sound is over and done,
And fair in the city behind them lies the flood of the morning sun:
No man of the Niblungs murmureth, none biddeth turn aback
And still their hands are empty, and sleep the edges of wrack.

Huge, dim is the hall of Atli, and faint and far aloof,
As stars in the misty even, yet hang the lamps in the roof,
And but little daylight toucheth the walls and the hangings of gold:
No King and no earl-folk's children do the bidden guests behold,
Till they look aloft to the high-seat, and lo, a woman alone,
A white queen crowned, and silent as the ancient shapen stone
That men find in the dale deserted, as beneath the moon they wend,
When they weary even to slumber, and the journey draws to an end.
Chill then are the hearts of the warriors, for they know how they look on a queen,
That Gudrun well-belovèd of the days that once have been;
Then were men that murmured on Sigurd, and as in some dream of the night
They looked, but the left hand failed them, and there came no help from the right.

But forth stood the mighty Gunnar, and men heard his kingly voice
As he spake: "O child of my father, I see thee again and rejoice,
Though I wot not where I have wended, or where thou dwellest on earth,
Or if this be the dead men's dwelling, or the hall of Atli's mirth!"

She stirred not, nothing she answered: but forth stood Hogni the King,
Clear, sharp, in the house of the stranger did the voice of the fearless ring:
"O sister, O daughter of Giuki, O child of my mother's womb,
By what death shall the Niblungs perish, what day is the day of their doom?"

Forth then from the lips of Gudrun a dreadful voice was borne:
"Ye shall die to-day, O brethren, at the hands of a King forsworn."

As she spake the outer door-leaves clashed to with a mighty sound,
And the outer air was troubled with a new noise gathering around:
As of leaves in the midmost summer ere the dusk of the even warm.
When the winds in the hillsides gathered go forth before the storm;
Men abode, and a wicket opened on the feast-hall's inner side
And the Niblungs looked for the coming of King Atli in his pride:
But one man entered only, and he thin and old and spare,

A swordless man and a little—yet was King Atli there.
 He looked not once on the Niblungs, but forth to the high-seat went,
 And stood aloof from Gudrun with his eyes to the hall-floor bent:
 Thence came a voice from his lips, and men heard, for the hush was great.
 And the hearts of the bold were astonished 'neath the overhanging fate.

"Ye are come, O Kings of the Niblungs, ye are come, O slayers of men!
 But how great, and where is the ransom that shall buy your departure again?"

Then spake the wise-heart Hogni: "Do the bidden guests so long
 To depart to the night and the silence from the fire and the wine and the song?
 Fear not! the feast shall be merry, and here we abide in thine hall,
 Till thou and the great feast-master shall bid the best befall."

There were cries of men in the city, there was clang and clatter of steel.
 And high cried the thin-voiced Atli, the lord of the Eastland weal:
 "Ye are come in your pride, O Niblungs; but this day of days is mine:
 Will ye die? will ye live and be little? Hear now the token and sign!"

Great then grew the voices without, with one name was the city filled,
 Yea, all the world it might be, and all sounds of the earth were stilled
 With that cry of the name of Atli: but Gunnar stood for a space
 Till the cry was something sunken, then he put back the helm from his face
 And spread out his hands before him, and his hands were empty and bare
 As he stood in the front of the Niblungs like a great God smiling and fair:

"We shall live and never be little, we shall die and be masters of fame:
 I know not thy will, O Atli, nor what thou wouldst with thy name."

"Ye shall know my will," said Atli, "ye shall do it, or do no more
 The deeds of the days of the living: ye shall render the garnered store,
 Ye shall give forth the Gold of Sigurd, the wealth of the uttermost strand."

"To give a gift," cried Hogni, "we came to King Atli's land:
 Tomorn for a little season thou shalt be the richest fool
 Of all kings ever told of; and the rest let the high Gods rule."

"O King of the East," said Gunnar, "great gifts for thee draw nigh,
 But the treasure of the Niblungs in their guarded house shall lie."

"What then will ye do?" quoth Atli; "have ye seen the fish in the net?"

"Eve telleth of deeds," said Gunnar, "and it is but the morning as yet."

Said Atli: "Yea, will ye die? are there no deeds left you to do?"

"We shall smite with the sword," said the Niblung, "and tomorn will we journey anew."

"Craftsman Hogni," said Atli, "where then are the shifts of the wise?"

Said Hogni: "To smite with the sword, and go glad from the country of lies."

"So died the fool," said Atli, "as Hogni dieth today."

"Smote the blind and the aimless," said Hogni, "and Baldur passed away."

Said Atli: "Yet may ye live in the wholesome light of the sun,
 And your latter days be as plenteous as the deeds your hands have done."

"Dost thou hearken, O sword," said Gunnar, "and yet thou liest in peace?
 When then wilt thou look on the daylight, that the words of the mocker may cease?"

"Thou, Hogni the wise," said Atli, "art thou weary of wisdom and lore,
 Wilt thou die with these fools of the sword, and be mocked mid the blind of the war?"

"Many things have I learned," said Hogni, "but today's task, easy it is;
 For men die every hour and they wage no master for this.
 —Get hence, thou evil King, thou liar and traitor of kings,
 Lest the edge of my sword be thy portion and not the ruddy rings!"

Then Atli shrank from before him, and the eyes of his intent,
And no more words he cast them, but forth from the hall he went,
And again were the Niblung children alone in the hall of their foes
With the wan and silent woman: but without great clamour arose,
And the clashing of steel against steel, and the crying of man unto man,
And the wind of that summer morning through the Eastland banners ran:
Then so loud o'er all was winded a mighty horn of fight,
That unheard were the shouts of the Niblungs as Gunnar's sword leapt white.
But Hogni turned to the great-one who the Niblung trumpet bore,
And he took the mighty metal, and kissed the brass of war,
And its shattering blast went forward, and beat back from the gable-wall
And shook the ancient timbers, and the carven work of the hall:
Then it was to the Niblung warriors as their very hearts they heard
Cry out, not glad nor sorry, nor hoping, nor afeard,
But touched by the hand of Odin, smit with foretaste of the day,
When the fire shall burn up fooling, and the veil shall fall away;
When bare-faced, all unmingled, shall the evil stand in the light,
And men's deeds shall be nothing doubtful, nor the foe that they shall smite.
In the hall was the voice of the trumpet, but therein might it nowise abide,
But over burg and lealand it spread full far and wide,
And strong men quaked as they heard it in the guarded chamber of stone,
And the lord of weaponed kinsfolk was as one that sitteth alone
In a land by the foeman wasted, and no man to his neighbour spoke,
But they thought on the death of Atli and the slaughter of the folk.

Of the Battle in Atli's Hall.

Ye shall know that in Atli's feast-hall on the side that joined the house
Were many carven doorways whose work was glorious
With marble stones and gold-work, and their doors of beaten brass:
Lo now, in the merry morning how the story cometh to pass!
—While the echoes of the trumpet yet fill the people's ears,
And Hogni casts by the war-horn, and his Dwarf-wrought sword uprears,
All those doors aforesaid open, and in pour the streams of steel,
The best of the Eastland champions, the bold men of Atli's weal:
They raise no cry of battle nor cast forth threat of woe,
And their helmed and hidden faces from each other none may know:
Then a light in the hall ariseth, and the fire of battle runs
All adown the front of the Niblungs in the face of the mighty-ones;
All eyes are set upon them, hard drawn is every breath,
Ere the foremost points be mingled and death be blent with death.
—All eyes save the eyes of Hogni; but e'en as the edges meet,
He turneth about for a moment to the gold of the kingly seat,
Then aback to the front of battle; there then, as the lightning-flash
Through the dark night showeth the city when the clouds of heaven clash,
And the gazer shrinketh backward, yet he seeth from end to end
The street and the merry market, and the windows of his friend,
And the pavement where his footsteps yestre'en returning trod,
Now white and changed and dreadful 'neath the threatening voice of God;
So Hogni seeth Gudrun, and the face he used to know,
Unspeaking, unchanging, with white unknitted brow,
With half-closed lips untrembling, with deedless hands and cold
Laid still on knees that stir not, and the linen's moveless fold.
Turned Hogni unto the spear-wall, and smote from where he stood,

And hewed with his sword two-handed as the axe-man in a wood:
 Before his sword was a champion and the edges clave to the chin,
 And the first man fell in the feast-hall of those that should fall therein,
 Then man with man was dealing, and the Niblung host of war
 Was swept by the leaping iron, as the rock anigh the shore
 By the ice-cold waves of winter: yet a moment Gunnar stayed,
 As high in his hand unbloodied he shook his awful blade;
 And he cried:
 "O Eastland champions, do ye behold it here,
 The sword of the ancient Giuki? Fall on and have no fear,
 But slay and be slain and be famous, if your master's will it be!
 Yet are we the blameless Niblungs, and bidden guests are we:
 So forbear, if ye wander hood-winked, nor for nothing slay and be slain;
 For I know not what to tell you of the dead that live again."
 So he saith in the midst of the foemen with his war-flame reared on high,
 But all about and around him goes up a bitter cry
 From the iron men of Atli, and the bickering of the steel
 Sends a roar up to the roof-ridge, and the Niblung war-ranks reel
 Behind the steadfast Gunnar: but lo, have ye seen the corn,
 While yet men grind the sickle, by the wind-streak overborne
 When the sudden rain sweeps downward, and summer groweth black,
 And the smitten wood-side roareth 'neath the driving thunder-wrack?
 So before the wise-heart Hogni shrank the champions of the East
 As his great voice shook the timbers in the hall of Atli's feast.
 There he smote and beheld not the smitten, and by nought were his edges stopped;
 He smote and the dead were thrust from him; a hand with its shield he lopped;
 There met him Atli's marshal, and his arm at the shoulder he shred;
 Three swords were upreared against him of the best of the kin of the dead;
 And he struck off a head to the rightward, and his sword through a throat he thrust,
 But the third stroke fell on his helm-crest, and he stooped to the ruddy dust,
 And uprose as the ancient Giant, and both his hands were wet:
 Red then was the world to his eyes, as his hand to the labour he set;
 Swords shook and fell in his pathway, huge bodies leapt and fell,
 Harsh grided shield and war-helm like the tempest-smitten bell,
 And the war-cries ran together, and no man his brother knew,
 And the dead men loaded the living, as he went the war-wood through;
 And man 'gainst man was huddled, till no sword rose to smite.
 And clear stood the glorious Hogni in an island of the fight,
 And there ran a river of death 'twixt the Niblung and his foes,
 And therefrom the terror of men and the wrath of the Gods arose.
 Now fell the sword of Gunnar and rose up red in the air,
 And hearkened the song of the Niblung, as his voice rang glad and clear,
 And rejoiced and leapt at the Eastmen, and cried as it met the rings
 Of a giant of King Atli, and a murder-wolf of kings;
 But it quenched its thirst in his entrails, and knew the heart in his breast,
 And hearkened the praise of Gunnar, and lingered not to rest,
 But fell upon Atli's brother and stayed not in his brain;
 Then he fell and the King leapt over, and clave a neck atwain,
 And leapt o'er the sweep of a pole-axe and thrust a lord in the throat,
 And King Atli's banner-bearer through shield and hauberk smote;
 Then he laughed on the huddled East-folk, and against their war-shields drave
 While the white swords tossed about him, and that archer's skull he clave
 Whom Atli had bought in the Southlands for many a pound of gold;
 And the dark-skinned fell upon Gunnar and over his war-shield rolled

And cumbered his sword for a season, and the many blades fell on,
And sheared the cloudy helm-crest and rents in his hauberk won,
And the red blood ran from Gunnar; till that Giuki's sword outburst,
As the fire-tongue from the smoulder that the leafy heap hath nursed,
And unshielded smote King Gunnar, and sent the Niblung song
Through the quaking stems of battle in the hall of Atli's wrong:
Then he rent the knitted war-hedge till by Hogni's side he stood,
And kissed him amidst of the spear-hail, and their cheeks were wet with blood.
Then on came the Niblung bucklers, and they drave the East-folk home
As the bows of the oar-driven long-ship beat off the waves in foam:
They leave their dead behind them, and they come to the doors and the wall,
And a few last spears from the fleeing amidst their shield-hedge fall:
But the doors clash to in their faces, as the fleeing rout they drive,
And fain would follow after; and none is left alive
In the feast-hall of King Atli, save those fishes of the net,
And the white and silent woman above the slaughter set.
Then biddeth the heart-wise Hogni, and men to the windows climb,
And uplift the war-grey corpses, dead drift of the stormy time,
And cast them adown to their people: thence they come aback and say
That scarce shall ye see the houses, and no whit the wheel-worn way
For the spears and shields of the Eastlands that the merchant city throng;
And back to the Niblung burg-gate the way seemed weary-long.
Yet passeth hour on hour, and the doors they watch and ward,
But a long while hear no mail-clash, nor the ringing of the sword;
Then droop the Niblung children, and their wounds are waxen chill,
And they think of the Burg by the river, and the builded holy hill,
And their eyes are set on Gudrun as of men who would beseech;
But unlearned are they in craving and know not dastard's speech.
Then doth Giuki's first-begotten a deed most fair to be told,
For his fair harp Gunnar taketh, and the warp of silver and gold;
With the hand of a cunning harper he dealeth with the strings,
And his voice in their midst goeth upward, as of ancient days he sings,
Of the days before the Niblungs, and the days that shall be yet;
Till the hour of toil and smiting the warrior hearts forget,
Nor hear the gathering foemen, nor the sound of swords aloof:
Then clear the song of Gunnar goes up to the dusky roof;
And the coming spear-host tarries, and the bearers of the woe
Through the cloisters of King Atli with lingering footsteps go.
But Hogni looketh on Gudrun, and no change in her face he sees,
And no stir in her folded linen and the deedless hands on her knees:
Then from Gunnar's side he hasteneth; and lo, the open door,
And a foeman treadeth the pavement, and his lips are on Atli's floor,
For Hogni is death in the doorway: then the Niblungs turn on the foe,
And the hosts are mingled together, and blow cries out on blow.
Still the song goeth up from Gunnar, though his harp to earth be laid;
But he fighteth exceeding wisely, and is many a warrior's aid,
And he shieldeth and delivereth, and his eyes search through the hall,
And woe is he for his fellows, as his battle-brethren fall;
For the turmoil hideth little from that glorious folk-king's eyes,
And o'er all he beholdeth Gudrun, and his soul is waxen wise,
And he saith: We shall look on Sigurd, and Sigmund of old days,
And see the boughs of the Branstock o'er the ancient Volsung's praise.
Woe's me for the wrath of Hogni! From the door he giveth aback
That the Eastland slayers may enter to the murder and the wrack:

Then he rageth and driveth the battle to the golden kingly seat,
And the last of the foes he slayeth by Gudrun's very feet,
That the red blood splasheth her raiment; and his own blood therewithal
He casteth aloft before her, and the drops on her white hands fall:
But nought she seeth or heedeth, and again he turns to the fight,
Nor heedeth stroke nor wounding so he a foe may smite:
Then the battle opens before him, and the Niblungs draw to his side;
As Death in the world first fashioned, through the feast-hall doth he stride.
And so once more do the Niblungs sweep that murder-flood of men
From the hall of toils and treason, and the doors swing to again.

Then again is there peace for a little within the fateful fold;
But the Niblungs look about them, and but few folk they behold
Upright on their feet for the battle: now they climb aloft no more.
Nor cast the dead from the windows; but they raise a rampart of war,
And its stones are the fallen East-folk, and no lowly wall is that.

Therein was Gunnar the mighty: on the shields of men he sat,
And the sons of his people hearkened, for his hand through the harp-strings ran,
And he sang in the hall of his foeman of the Gods and the making of man,
And how season was sundered from season in the days of the fashioning,
And became the Summer and Autumn, and became the Winter and Spring;
He sang of men's hunger and labour, and their love and their breeding of broil,
And their hope that is fostered of famine, and their rest that is fashioned of toil:
Fame then and the sword he sang of, and the hour of the hardy and wise,
When the last of the living shall perish, and the first of the dead shall arise,
And the torch shall be lit in the daylight, and God unto man shall pray,
And the heart shall cry out for the hand in the fight of the uttermost day.

So he sang, and beheld not Gudrun, save as long ago he saw
His sister, the little maiden of the face without a flaw:
But wearily Hogni beheld her, and no change in her face there was,
And long thereon gazed Hogni, and set his brows as the brass,
Though the hands of the King were weary, and weak his knees were grown.
And he felt as a man unholpen in a waste land wending alone.

Now the noon was long passed over when again the rumour arose,
And through the doors cast open flowed in the river of foes:
They flooded the hall of the murder, and surged round that rampart of dead;
No war-duke ran before them, no lord to the onset led,
But the thralls shot spears at adventure, and shot out shafts from afar,
Till the misty hall was blinded with the bitter drift of war:
Few and faint were the Niblung children, and their wounds were waxen acold,
And they saw the Hell-gates open as they stood in their grimly hold:
Yet thrice stormed out King Hogni, thrice stormed out Gunnar the King,
Thrice fell they aback yet living to the heart of the fated ring;
And they looked and their band was little, and no man but was wounded sore,
And the hall seemed growing greater, such hosts of foes it bore,
So tossed the iron harvest from wall to gilded wall;
And they looked and the white-clad Gudrun sat silent over all.

Then the churls and thralls of the Eastland howled out as wolves accurst,
But oft gaped the Niblungs voiceless, for they choked with anger and thirst;
And the hall grew hot as a furnace, and men drank their flowing blood,
Men laughed and gnawed on their shield-rims, men knew not where they stood
And saw not what was before them; as in the dark men smote,
Men died heart-broken, unsmitten; men wept with the cry in the throat,
Men lived on full of war-shafts, men cast their shields aside

And caught the spears to their bosoms; men rushed with none beside,
 And fell unarmed on the foemen, and tore and slew in death:
 And still down rained the arrows as the rain across the heath;
 Still proud o'er all the turmoil stood the Kings of Giuki born,
 Nor knit were the brows of Gunnar, nor his song-speech overworn;
 But Hogni's mouth kept silence, and oft his heart went forth
 To the long, long day of the darkness, and the end of worldly worth.

 Loud rose the roar of the East-folk, and the end was coming at last;
 Now the foremost locked their shield-rims and the hindmost over them cast,
 And nigher they drew and nigher, and their fear was fading away,
 For every man of the Niblungs on the shaft-strewn pavement lay,
 Save Gunnar the King and Hogni: still the glorious King up-bore
 The cloudy shield of the Niblungs set full of shafts of war;
 But Hogni's hands had fainted, and his shield had sunk adown,
 So thick with the Eastland spearwood was that rampart of renown;
 And hacked and dull were the edges that had rent the wall of foes;
 Yet he stood upright by Gunnar before that shielded close,
 Nor looked on the foemen's faces as their wild eyes drew anear,
 And their faltering shield-rims clattered with the remnant of their fear;
 But he gazed on the Niblung woman, and the daughter of his folk,
 Who sat o'er all unchanging ere the war-cloud over them broke.

 Now nothing might men hearken in the house of Atli's weal,
 Save the feet slow tramping onward, and the rattling of the steel,
 And the song of the glorious Gunnar, that rang as clearly now
 As the speckled storm-cock singeth from the scant-leaved hawthorn-bough
 When the sun is dusking over and the March snow pelts the land.
 There stood the mighty Gunnar with sword and shield in hand,
 There stood the shieldless Hogni with set unangry eyes,
 And watched the wall of war-shields o'er the dead men's rampart rise,
 And the white blades flickering nigher, and the quavering points of war.
 Then the heavy air of the feast-hall was rent with a fearful roar,
 And the turmoil came and the tangle, as the wall together ran:
 But aloft yet towered the Niblungs, and man toppled over man,
 And leapt and struggled to tear them; as whiles amidst the sea
 The doomed ship strives its utmost with mid-ocean's mastery,
 And the tall masts whip the cordage, while the welter whirls and leaps,
 And they rise and reel and waver, and sink amid the deeps:
 So before the little-hearted in King Atli's murder-hall
 Did the glorious sons of Giuki 'neath the shielded onrush fall:
 Sore wounded, bound and helpless, but living yet, they lie
 Till the afternoon and the even in the first of night shall die.

Of the Slaying of the Niblung Kings.

Lo now, 'tis an hour or twain, and a labour lightly won
 By the serving-men of Atli, and the Niblung blood is gone
 From the golden house of his greatness, and the Eastland dead no more
 Lie in great heaps together on Atli's mazy floor:
 Then they cast fair summer blossoms o'er the footprints of the dead,
 They wreath round Atli's high-seat and the benches fair bespread,
 And they light the odorous torches, and the sun of the golden roof,
 Till the candles of King Atli hold dusky night aloof.

 So they toil and are heavy-hearted, nor know what next shall betide,
 As they look on the stranger-woman in the heart of Atli's pride.

Now stand they aback for the trumpet and the merry minstrelsy,
 For they tremble before King Atli, and golden-clad is he,
 And his golden crown is heavy and he strides exceeding slow,
 With the wise and the mighty about him, through the house of the Niblungs' woe.
 There then by the Niblung woman on the throne he sat him down,
 And folk heard the gold gear tinkle and the rings of the Eastland crown:
 Folk looked on his rich adornment, on King Atli's pride they gazed,
 And the bright beams wearied their eyen, by the glory were they dazed;
 There the councillors kept silence and the warriors clad in steel,
 All men lowly, all men mighty, that had care of Atli's weal;
 Yea there in the hall were they waiting for the word to come from his lips,
 As they of the merchant-city behold the shield-hung ships
 Sweep slow through the windless haven with their gaping heads of gold,
 And they know not their nation and names, nor hath aught of their errand been told.

But King Atli looketh before him, and is grown too great to rejoice,
 And he speaks and the world is troubled, though thin and scant be his voice:

"Bring forth the fallen and conquered, bring forth the bounden thrall,
 That they who were once the Niblungs did once King Hogni call."

So they brought him fettered and bound; and scarce on his feet he stood,
 But men stayed him up by the King; for the sword had drunk of his blood,
 And the might of his body had failed him, and yet so great was he
 That the East-folk cowered before him and the might of his majesty.

Then spake the all-great Atli: "Thou yielded thrall of war,
 I would hear thee tell of the Treasure, the Hoard of the kings of yore!"

But words were grown heavy to Hogni, and scarce he spake with a smile:
 "Let the living seek their desire; for indeed thou shalt live for a while."

"Wilt thou speak and live," said Atli, "nor pay for the blood thou hast spilt?"

Said he: "Thou art waxen so mighty, thou mayst have the Gold when thou wilt."

Said the King: "I will give thee thy life, and forgive thee measureless woe."

"It was gathered for thee," said Hogni, "and fashioned long ago."

"Speak, man o'ercome," quoth Atli: "Is life so little a thing?"

"Art thou mighty? put forth thine hand and gather the Gold!" said the King.

"Wilt thou tell of the Gold," said the East-King, "the desire of many eyes?"

"Yea, once on a day," said Hogni, "when the dead from the sea shall arise."

Said he: "So great is my longing, that, O foe, I would have thee live,
 Yea, live and be great as aforetime, if this word thou yet wouldst give."

Said the Niblung: "Thee shall I heed, or the longing of thy pride?

I, who heeded Sigurd nothing, who thrust mine oath aside,

When the years were young and goodly and the summer bore increase!

Shall I crave my life of the greedy and pray for days of peace?

I, who whetted the sword for Sigurd, and bared the blade in the morn,

And smote ere the sun's uprising, and left my sister forlorn:

'Yea I lied,' quoth the God-loved Singer, 'when the will of the Gods I told!'

—Stretch forth thine hand, O Mighty, and take thy Treasure of Gold!"

Then was Atli silent a little, for anger dulled his thought,

And the heaped-up wealth of the Eastland seemed an idle thing and nought:

He turned and looked upon Gudrun as one who was fain to beseech,

But he saw her eyes that beheld not, and her lips that knew no speech,

And fear shot across his anger, and guile with his wrath was blent,

And he spake aloud to the war-lords:

"O ye, shall the eve be spent,

Nor behold the East rejoicing? what a mock for the Gods is this,
That men ever care for the morrow, nor nurse their toil-won bliss!
Lo now, this hour I speak in is the first of the seven-days' feast,
And the spring of our exultation o'er the glory of the East:
Draw nigh, O wise, O mighty, and gather words to praise
The hope of the King accomplished in the harvest of his days:
Bear forth this slave of the Niblungs to the pit and the chamber of death,
That he hearken the council of night, and the rede that tomorrow saith,
And think of the might of King Atli, and his hand that taketh his own,
Though the hill-fox bark at his going, and his path with the bramble be grown."

So they led the Niblung away from the light and the joy of the feast,
In the chamber of death they cast him, and the pit of the Lord of the East:
And thralls were the high King's warders; yet sons of the wise withal
Came down to sit with Hogni in the doomed man's darkling hall;
For they looked in his face and feared, lest Atli smite too nigh
The kin of the Gods of Heaven, and more than a man's child die.

But 'neath the golden roof-sun, at beginning of the night,
Is the seven-days' feast of triumph in the hall of Atli dight;
And his living Earls come thither in peaceful gold attire,
And the cups on the East-King's tables shine out as a river of fire,
And sweet is the song of the harp-strings, and the singers' honeyed words;
While wide through all the city do wives bewail their lords,
And curse the untimely hour and the day of the land forlorn,
And the year that the Earth shall rue of, and children never born.

But Atli spake to his thrall-folk, and they went, and were little afraid
To take the glorious Gunnar, and the King in shackles laid:
They deemed they should live for ever, and eat and sleep as the swine,
To them were the tales of the singers no token and no sign;
For the blossom of the Niblungs they rolled amid the dust,
That well-renowned Gunnar 'neath Atli's chair they thrust;
The feet of the Eastland liar on Gunnar's neck are set,
And by Atli Gudrun sitteth, and nought she stirreth yet.

Outbrake the glee of the dastards, and they that had not dared
To meet the swords of the Niblungs, no whit the God-folk feared:
They forgot that the Norns were awake, and they praised the master of guile
The war-spent conquering Atli and the face without a smile;
And the tumult of their triumph and the wordless mingled roar
Went forth from that hall of the Eastlands and smote the heavenly floor.

At last spake Atli the mighty: "Stand up, thou war-won thrall,
Whom they that were once the Niblungs did once King Gunnar call!"

From the dust they dragged up Gunnar, and set him on his feet,
And the heart within him was living and the pride for a war-king meet;
And his glory was nothing abated, and fair he seemed and young,
As the first of the Cloudy Kings, fresh shoot from the sower sprung.
But Atli looked upon him, and a smile smoothed out his brow
As he said: "What thoughtest thou, Gunnar, when thou layst in the dust e'en now?"

He said: "Of Valhall I thought, and the host of my fathers' land,
And of Hogni that thou hast slaughtered, and my brother Sigurd's hand."

Said Atli: "Think of thy life, and the days that shall be yet,
And thyself, maybe, as aforesaid, in the throne of thy father set."

"O Eastland liar," said Gunnar, "no more will I live and rue."

Said Atli: "The word I have spoken, thy word may yet make true."

"I weary of speech," said the Niblung, "with those that are lesser than I."

"Yet words of mine shalt thou hearken," said Atli, "or ever thou die."

"So crieth the fool," said Gunnar, "on the God that his folly hath slain."

Said Atli: "Forth shall my word, nor yet shall be gathered again."

"Yet meeter were thy silence; for thy folk make ready to sing."

"O Gunnar, I long for the Gold with the heart and the will of a king."

"This were good to tell," said Gunnar, "to the Gods that fashioned the earth!"

"Make me glad with the Gold," said Atli, "live on in honour and worth!"

With a dreadful voice cried Gunnar: "O fool, hast thou heard it told

Who won the Treasure aforetime and the ruddy rings of the Gold?

It was Sigurd, child of the Volsungs, the best sprung forth from the best:

He rode from the North and the mountains and became my summer-guest.

My friend and my brother sworn: he rode the Wavering Fire

And won me the Queen of Glory and accomplished my desire;

The praise of the world he was, the hope of the bidders in wrong,

The help of the lowly people, the hammer of the strong:

Ah, oft in the world henceforward shall the tale be told of the deed,

And I, e'en I, will tell it in the day of the Niblungs' Need:

For I sat night-long in my armour, and when light was wide o'er the land

I slaughtered Sigurd my brother, and looked on the work of mine hand.

And now, O mighty Atli, I have seen the Niblungs' wreck,

And the feet of the faint-heart dastard have trodden Gunnar's neck;

And if all be little enough, and the Gods begrudge me rest,

Let me see the heart of Hogni cut quick from his living breast,

And laid, on the dish before me: and then shall I tell of the Gold,

And become thy servant, Atli, and my life at thy pleasure hold.

O goodly story of Gunnar, and the King of the broken troth

In the heavy Need of the Niblungs, and the Sorrow of Odin the Goth!"

Grim then waxed Atli bemocked, yet he pondered a little while,

For yet with his bitter anger strove the hope of his greedy guile,

And as one who falleth a-dreaming he hearkened Gunnar's word,

While his eyes beheld that Treasure, and the rings of the Ancient Hoard.

But he spake low-voiced to his sword-carles, and they heard and understood,

And departed swift from the feast-hall to do the work he would.

To the chamber of death they gat them, to the pit they went adown,

And saw the wise men sitting round the war-king of renown:

Then they spake: "We are Atli's bondmen, and Atli's doom we bring:

We shall carve the heart from thy body, and thou living yet, O King."

Then Hogni laughed, for they feared him; and he said: "Speed ye the work!

For fain would I look on the storehouse where such marvels used to lurk,

And the forge of fond desires, and the nurse of life that fails.

Take heed now! deeds are doing for the fashioners of tales."

But they feared as they looked on the Niblung, and the wise men hearkened and spake,

And bade them abide for a season, yea even for Atli's sake,

For the night-slaying is as the murder; and they looked on each other and feared,

For Atli's bitter whisper their very hearts had heard:

Then they said: "The King makes merry, as a well the white wine springs,

And the red wine runs as a river; and what are the hearts of kings,

That men may know them naked from the hearts of bond and thrall?

Nor go we empty-handed to King Atli in his hall."

So the sword-carles spake to each other, and they looked and a man they saw,

Who should hew the wood if he lived, and for thralls the water should draw,

A thrall-born servant of servants, begetter of thralls on the earth:
And they said: "If this one were away, scarce greater were waxen the dearth
That this morning hath wrought on the Eastland; for the years shall eke out his woe,
And no day his toil shall lessen, and worse and worse shall he grow."

They drew the steel new-whetted, on the thrall they laid the hand;
For they said: "All hearts be fashioned as the heart of the King of the land."
But the thrall was bewildered with anguish, and wept and bewailed him sore
For the loss of his life of labour, and the grief that long he bore.

But wroth was the son of Giuki and he spake: "It is idle and vain,
And two men for one shall perish, and the knife shall be whetted again.
It is better to die than be sorry, and to hear the trembling cry,
And to see the shame of the poor: O fools, must the lowly die
Because kings strove with swords? I bid you to hasten the end,
For my soul is sick with confusion, and fain on the way would I wend."

But the life of the thrall is over, and his fearful heart they set
On a fair wide golden platter, and bear it ruddy wet
To the throne of the triumphing East-King; he looketh, and feareth withal
Lest the house should fail about him and the golden roof should fall:
But Gunnar laughed beside him, and spake o'er the laden gold:

"O heart of a feeble trembler, no heart of Hogni the bold!
A gold dish bears thee quaking, yet indeed thou quakedst more
When the breast of the helpless dastard the burden of thee bore."

The great hall was smitten silent and its mirth to fear was turned,
For the wrath of the King was kindled, and the eyes of Atli burned,
And he cried as they trembled before him: "Let me see the heart of my foe!
Fear ye to mock King Atli till his head in the dust be alow!"

Then the sword-carles flee before him, and are angry with their dread,
For they fear the living East-King yet more than the Niblung dead:
They come to the pit and the death-house, and the whetted steel they bear;
They are pale before King Hogni; as winter-wolves they glare
Whom the ravening hunger driveth, when the chapmen journey slow,
And their horses faint in the moon-dusk, and stumble through the snow.

But Hogni laughed before them, and he saith: "Now welcome again,
Now welcome again, war-fellows! Was Atli hood-winked then?
I looked that ye should be speedy; and, forsooth, ye needs must haste,
Lest more lives than one this even for Atli's will ye waste."

About him throng the sword-men, and they shout as the war-fain cry
In the heart of the bitter battle when their hour is come to die,
And they cast themselves upon him, as on some wide-shielded man
That fierce in the storm of Odin upreareth edges wan.

With the bound man swift is the steel: sore tremble the sons of the wise,
And their hearts grow faint within them; yet no man hideth his eyes
As the edges deal with the mighty: nor dreadful is he now,
For the mock from his mouth hath faded, and the threat hath failed from his brow,
And his face is as great and Godlike as his fathers of old days,
As fair as an image fashioned in remembrance of their praise:
But fled is the spirit of Hogni, and every deed he did,
The seed of the world it lieth, in the hand of Odin hid.

On the gold is the heart of Hogni, and men bear it forth to the King,
As he sits in the hall of his triumph mid the glee and the harp-playing:
Lo, the heart of a son of Giuki! and Gunnar liveth yet,
And the white unangry Gudrun by the Eastland King is set:

Upriseth the soul of Atli, and his breast is swollen with pride,
 And he laughs in the face of Gunnar and the woman set by his side:
 Then he looks on his living earls, and they cast their cry to the roof,
 And it clangs o'er the woeful city and wails through the night aloof;
 All the world of man-folk hearkeneth, and hath little joy therein,
 Though the men of the East in glory high-tide with Atli win.
 But fair is the face of Gunnar as the token draweth anigh;
 And he saith: "O heart of Hogni, on the gold indeed dost thou lie,
 And as little as there thou quakest far less wert thou wont to quake
 When thou lay'st in the breast of the mighty, and wert glad for his gladness' sake,
 And wert sorry with his sorrow; O mighty heart, farewell!
 Farewell for a little season, till thy latest deed I tell."

Then was Gunnar silent a little, and the shout in the hall had died,
 And he spoke as a man awakening, and turned on Atli's pride.
 "Thou all-rich King of the Eastlands, e'en such a man might I be
 That I might utter a word, and the heart should be glad in thee,
 And I should live and be sorry; for I, I only am left
 To tell of the ransom of Odin, and the wealth from the toiler reft.
 Lo, once it lay in the water, hid, deep adown it lay,
 Till the Gods were grieved and lacking, and men saw it and the day:
 Let it lie in the water once more, let the Gods be rich and in peace!
 But I at least in the world from the words and the babble shall cease."

So he spake and Atli beheld him, and before his eyes he shrank:
 Still deep of the cup of desire the mighty Atli drank,
 And to overcome seemed little if the Gold he might not have,
 And his hard heart craved for a while to hold the King for a slave,
 A bondman blind and guarded in his glorious house and great:
 But he thought of the overbold, and of kings who have dallied with fate,
 And died bemocked and smitten; and he deemed it worsen than well
 While the last of the sons of Giuki hangeth back from his journey to Hell:
 So he turneth away from the stranger, and beholdeth Gudrun his wife,
 Not glad nor sorry by seeming, no stirrer nor stayer of strife:
 Then he looked at his living earl-folk, and thought of his groves of war,
 And his realm and the kindred nations, and his measureless guarded store:
 And he thought: Shall Atli perish, shall his name be cast to the dead,
 Though the feeble folk go wailing? Then he cried aloud and said:
 "Why tarry ye, Sons of the Morning? the wain for the bondman is dight;
 And the folk that are waiting his body have need of no sunshine to smite.
 Go forth 'neath the stars and the night-wind; go forth by the cloud and the moon,
 And come back with the word in the dawning, that my house may be merry at noon!"
 Then the sword-folk rise round Gunnar, round the fettered and bound they throng,
 As men in the bitter battle round the God-kin over-strong;
 They bore him away to the doorway, and the winds were awake in the night,
 And the wood of the thorns of battle in the moon shone sharp and bright;
 But Gunnar looked to the heavens, and blessed the promise of rain,
 And the windy drift of the clouds, and the dew on the builded wain:
 And the sword-folk tarried a little, and the sons of the wise were there,
 And beheld his face o'er the war-helms, and the wavy night of his hair.
 Then they feared for the weal of Atli, and the Niblung's harp they brought,
 And they dealt with the thralls of the sword, and commanded and besought,
 Till men loosened the gyves of Gunnar, and laid the harp by his side,
 Then the yoke-beasts lowed in the forecourt and the wheels of the waggon cried,
 And the war-thorns clashed in the night, and the men went dark on their way,
 And the city was silent before them, on the roofs the white moon lay.

Now they left the gate and the highway, and came to a lonely place,
Where the sun all day had been shining on the desert's empty face;
Then the moon ran forth from a cloud, the grey light shone and showed
The pit of King Atli's adders in the land without a road,
Digged deep adown in the desert with shining walls and smooth
For the Serpents' habitation, and the folk that know not ruth.
Therein they thrust King Gunnar, and he bare of his kingly weed,
But they gave his harp to the Niblung, and his hands of the gyves they freed;
They stood around in their war-gear to note what next should befall
For the comfort of King Atli, and the glee of the Eastland hall.
Still hot was that close with the sun, and thronged with the coiling folk,
And about the feet of Gunnar their hissing mouths awoke:
But he heeded them not nor beheld them, and his hands in the harp-strings ran,
As he sat him down in the midmost on a sun-scorched rock and wan:
And he sighed as one who resteth on a flowery bank by the way
When the wind is in the blossoms at the even-tide of day:
But his harp was murmuring low, and he mused: Am I come to the death,
And I, who was Gunnar the Niblung? nay, nay, how I draw my breath,
And love my life as the living! and so I ever shall do,
Though wrack be loosed in the heavens and the world be fashioned anew.
But the worms were beholding their prey, and they drew around and nigher,
Smooth coil, and flickering tongue, and eyes as the gold in the fire;
And he looked and beheld them and spake, nor stilled his harp meanwhile:
"What will ye? O thralls of Atli, O images of guile?"
Then, he rose at once to his feet, and smote the harp with his hand,
And it rang as if with a cry in the dream of a lonely land;
Then he fondled its wail as it faded, and orderly over the strings
Went the marvellous sound of its sweetness, like the march of Odin's kings
New-risen for play in the morning when o'er meadows of God-home they wend,
And hero playeth with hero, that their hands may be deft in the end.
But the crests of the worms were uplifted, though coil on coil was stayed,
And they moved but as dark-green rushes by the summer river swayed.
Then uprose the Song of Gunnar, and sang o'er his crafty hands,
And told of the World of Aforetime, unshapen, void of lands;
Yet it wrought, for its memory bideth, and it died and abode its doom;
It shaped, and the Upper-Heavens, and the hope came forth from its womb.
Great then grew the voice of Gunnar, and his speech was sweet on the wild,
And the moon on his harp was shining, and the hands of the Niblung child:
"So perished the Gap of the Gaping, and the cold sea swayed and sang,
And the wind came down on the waters, and the beaten rock-walls rang;
Then the Sun from the south came shining, and the Starry Host stood round,
And the wandering Moon of the heavens his habitation found;
And they knew not why they were gathered, nor the deeds of their shaping they knew:
But lo, Mid-Earth the Noble 'neath their might and their glory grew,
And the grass spread over its face, and the Night and the Day were born,
And it cried on the Death in the even, and it cried on the Life in the morn:
Yet it waxed and waxed, and knew not, and it lived and had not learned;
And where were the Framers that framed, and the Soul and the Might that had yearned?
"On the Thrones are the Powers that fashioned, and they name the Night and the Day,
And the tide of the Moon's increasing, and the tide of his waning away:
And they name the years for the story; and the Lands they change and change,
The great and the mean and the little, that this unto that may be strange:
They met, and they fashioned dwellings, and the House of Glory they built;
They met, and they fashioned the Dwarf-kind, and the Gold and the Gifts and the Guilt.

"There were twain, and they went upon earth, and were speechless unmighty and wan;
 They were hopeless, deathless, lifeless, and the Mighty named them Man:
 Then they gave them speech and power, and they gave them colour and breath;
 And deeds and the hope they gave them, and they gave them Life and Death;
 Yea, hope, as the hope of the Framers; yea, might, as the Fashioners had,
 Till they wrought, and rejoiced in their bodies, and saw their sons and were glad:
 And they changed their lives and departed, and came back as the leaves of the trees
 Come back and increase in the summer:—and I, I, I am of these;
 And I know of Them that have fashioned, and the deeds that have blossomed and grow;
 But nought of the Gods' repentance, or the Gods' undoing I know."

Then falleth the speech of Gunnar, and his lips the word forget,
 But his crafty hands are busy, and the harp is murmuring yet.
 And the crests of the worms have fallen, and their flickering tongues are still,
 The Roller and the Coiler, and Greyback, lord of ill,
 Grave-groper and Death-swaddler, the Slumberer of the Heath,
 Gold-wallower, Venom-smiter, lie still, forgetting death,
 And loose are coils of Long-back; yea, all as soft are laid
 As the kine in midmost summer about the elmy glade;
 —All save the Grey and Ancient, that holds his crest aloft,
 Light-wavering as the flame-tongue when the evening wind is soft:
 For he comes of the kin of the Serpent once wrought all wrong to nurse,
 The bond of earthly evil, the Midworld's ancient curse.

But Gunnar looked and considered, and wise and wary he grew,
 And the dark of night was waning and chill in the dawning it grew;
 But his hands were strong and mighty and the fainting harp he woke,
 And cried in the deadly desert, and the song from his soul out-broke:
 "O Harken, Kindreds and Nations, and all Kings of the plenteous earth.
 Heed, ye that shall come hereafter, and are far and far from the birth!
 I have dwelt in the world aforetime, and I called it the garden of God;
 I have stayed my heart with its sweetness, and fair on its freshness I trod;
 I have seen its tempest and wondered, I have cowered adown from its rain,
 And desired the brightening sunshine, and seen it and been fain;
 I have waked, time was, in its dawning; its noon and its even I wore;
 I have slept unafraid of its darkness, and the days have been many and more:
 I have dwelt with the deeds of the mighty; I have woven the web of the sword;
 I have borne up the guilt nor repented; I have sorrowed nor spoken the word;
 And I fought and was glad in the morning, and I sing in the night and the end:
 So let him stand forth, the Accuser, and do on the death-shoon to wend;
 For not here on the earth shall I hearken, nor on earth for the dooming shall stay,
 Nor stretch out mine hand for the pleading; for I see the spring of the day
 Round the doors of the golden Valhall, and I see the mighty arise,
 And I hearken the voice of Odin, and his mouth on Gunnar cries,
 And he nameth the Son of Giuki, and cries on deeds long done,
 And the fathers of my fathers, and the sons of yore ago."

"O Odin, I see, and I hearken; but, lo thou, the bonds on my feet,
 And the walls of the wilderness round me, ere the light of thy land I meet!
 I crave and I weary, Allfather, and long and dark is the road;
 And the feet of the mighty are weakened, and the back is bent with the load."

Then fainted the song of Gunnar, and the harp from his hand fell down,
 And he cried: "Ah, what hath betided? for cold the world hath grown,
 And cold is the heart within me, and my hand is heavy and strange;
 What voice is the voice I hearken in the chill and the dusk and the change?
 Where art thou, God of the war-fain? for this is the death indeed;
 And I unsworded, unshielded, in the Day of the Niblungs' Need!"

He fell to the earth as he spake, and life left Gunnar the King,
 For his heart was chilled for ever by the sleepless serpent's sting,
 The grey Worm, Great and Ancient—and day in the East began,
 And the moon was low in the heavens, and the light clouds over him ran.

The Ending of Gudrun.

Men sleep in the dwelling of Atli through the latter hours of night,
 Though the comfortless women be wailing as they that love not light
 Men sleep in the dawning-hour, and bowed down is Atli's head
 Amidst the gold and the purple, and the pillows of his bed:
 But hark, ere the sun's uprising, when folk see colours again,
 Is the trample of steeds in the fore-court, and the noise of steel and of men
 And Atli wakeneth and riseth, and is clad in purple and pall,
 And he goeth forth from the chamber and meeteth his earls in the hall
 A king full great and mighty, if a great king ever hath been;
 And over his head on the high-seat still sitteth Gudrun the Queen.

Then he said: "Whence come ye, children? whence come ye, Lords of the East?
 Shall today be for evil and mourning or a day of joyance and feast?"

They said: "Today shall be wailing for the foes of the Eastland kin;
 But for them that love King Atli shall the day of feasts begin:
 For we come from the land deserted, and the heath without a way,
 And now are the earth's folk telling of the Niblungs passed away."

Then King Atli turned unto Gudrun, and the new sun shone through the door,
 The long beams fell from the mountains and lighted Atli's floor:
 Then he cried: "Lo, the day-light, Gudrun! and the Cloudy Folk is gone;
 There is glory now in the Eastland, and thy lord is king alone."

But Gudrun rose from the high-seat, and her eyes on the King she turned;
 And he stood rejoicing before her, and his crown in the sunlight burned,
 With the golden gear was he swaddled, and he held the red-gold rod
 That the Kings of the East had carried since first they came from God:
 Down she came, and men kept silence, and the earls beheld her face,
 As her raiment rustled about her in the morning-joyous place:
 So she stood amidst of the sun-beams, by King Atli's board she stood,
 And men looked and wondered at her, would she speak them ill or good:
 She wept not, and she sighed not, nor smiled in the stranger land,
 But she stood before King Atli, and the cup was in her hand.

Then she spake: "Take, King, and drink it! for earth's mightiest men prevail,
 And to thee is the praise and the glory, and the ending of the tale:
 There are men to the dead land faring, but the dark o'er their heads is deep,
 They cry not, they return not, and no more renown they reap;
 But we do our will without them, nor fear their speech or frown;
 And glad shall be our uprising, and light our lying-down."

She said: "A maid of maidens my mother reared me erst;
 By the side of the glorious Gunnar my early days were nursed;
 By the side of the heart-wise Hogni I went from field to flower,
 Joy rose with the sun's uprising, nor sank in the twilight hour;
 Kings looked and laughed upon us as we played with the golden toy:
 And oft our hands were meeting as we mingled joy with joy."

More she spake: "O King command me! for women's knees are weak,
 And their feet are little steadfast, and their hands for comfort seek:
 On the earth the blossom falleth when the branch is dried with day,
 And the vine to the elm-bough clingeth when men smite the roots away."

Then drank the Eastland Atli as he looked in Gudrun's face,
 And beheld no wrath against him, and no hate of the coming days;
 Then he spake: "O mighty woman, this day the feast shall be
 For the heritage of Atli, and the gain of mine and me:
 For this day the Eastland people such great dominion win,
 That a world to their will new-fashioned 'neath their glory shall begin.
 Yet, since the mighty are fallen, and kings are gone from earth,
 Let these at the feast be remembered, and their ancient deeds of worth.
 So I bid thee, O King's Daughter, sit by Atli at the feast,
 To praise thy kin departed and Atli's weal increased;
 And the heirship-feast and the death-feast today shall be as one;
 And then shalt thou wake tomorrow with all thy mourning done,
 And all thy will accomplished, and thy glory great and sure.
 That for ever and for ever shall the tale thereof endure."

He spake in the sunny morning, and Gudrun answered and said:
 "Thou hast bidden me feast, O Atli, and thy will shall be obeyed:
 And well I thank thee, great-one, for the gifts thine hand would give;
 For who shall gainsay the mighty, and the happy Kings that live?
 Thou hast swallowed the might of the Niblungs, and their glory lieth in thee:
 Live long, and cherish thy wealth, that the world may wonder and see!"

Therewith to the bower of queens the Niblung wendeth her way,
 And in all the glory of women the folk her body array:
 Forth she comes with the crown on her head and the ivory rod in her hand,
 With queens for her waiting-women, and the hope of many a land:
 There she goes in that wonder of houses when the high-tide of Atli is dight,
 And her face is as fair as the sea, and her eyen are glittering bright.

By Atli's side she sitteth, o'er the earls they twain are set,
 And shields of the ancient wise-ones on the wall are hanging yet,
 And the golden sun of the roof-sky, the sun of Atli's pride,
 Through the beams where day but glimmers casts red light far and wide:
 The beakers clash thereunder, the red wine murmureth speech,
 And the eager long-beard warriors cast praises each to each
 Of the blossoming tree of the Eastland:—and tomorrow shall be as today,
 Yea, even more abundant, and all foes have passed away.

It was then in the noon-tide moment; o'er the earth high hung the sun,
 When the song o'er the mighty Niblungs in a stranger-house was begun,
 And their deeds were told by the foemen, and the names of hope they had
 Rang sweet in the hall of the murder to make King Atli glad:
 It is little after the noon-tide when thereof they sing no more,
 Nor tell of the strife that has been, and the leaping flames of war,
 And the vengeance lulled for ever and the wrath that shall never awake:
 For where is the kin of Hogni, and who liveth for Gunnar's sake?

So men in the hall make merry, nor note the afternoon,
 And the time when men grow weary with the task that ends not soon;
 The sun falls down unnoted, and night and her daughter are nigh,
 And a dull grey mist and awful hangeth over the east of the sky,
 And spreadeth, though winds are sleeping, and riseth higher and higher;
 But the clouds hang high in the west as a sea of rippling fire,
 That the face of the gazer is lighted, if unto the west ye gaze,
 And white walls in the lonely meadows grow ruddy under the blaze;
 Yet brighter e'en than the cloud-sea, far-off and clear serene,
 Mid purple clouds unlitten the light lift lieth between;
 And who looks, save the lonely shepherd on the brow of the houseless hill,
 Who hath many a day seen no man to tell him of good or of ill?

Day dies, and the storm-threats perish, and the stars to the heaven are come,
And the white moon climbeth upward and hangs o'er the Eastland home;
But no man in the hall of King Atli shall heed the heavens without,
For Atli's roof is their heaven, and thereto they cast the shout,
And this, the glory they builded, is become their God to praise,
The hope of their generations, the giver of goodly days:
No more they hearken the harp-strings, no more they hearken the song;
All the might of the deedful Niblungs is a tale forgotten long,
And yester-morning's murder is as though it ne'er had been;
They heed not the white-armed Gudrun, the glorious Stranger-Queen,
They heed not Atli triumphant, for they also, they are Kings,
They are brethren of the God-folk and the fashioners of things;
Nay, the Gods,—and the Gods have sorrow, and these shall rue no more,
These world-kings, these prevailers, these beaters-down of war:
What golden house shall hold them, what nightless shadowless heaven?
—So they feast in the hall of Atli, and that eve is the first of the seven.
So they feast, and weary, and know not how weary they are grown,
As they stretch out hands to gather where their hands have never sown;
They are drunken with wine and with folly, and the hope they would bring to pass
Of the mirth no man may compass, and the joy that never was,
Till their heads hang heavy with slumber, and their hands from the wine-cup fail,
And blind stray their hands in the harp-strings and their mouths may tell no tale.
Now the throne of Atli is empty, low lieth the world-king's head
Mid the woven gold and the purple, and the dreams of Atli's bed,
And Gudrun lieth beside him as the true by the faithful and kind,
And every foe is departed, and no fear is left behind:
Lo, lo, the rest of the night-tide for which all kings would long,
And all warriors of the people that have fought with fear and wrong.
Yet a while;—it was but an hour and the moon was hung so high,
As it seemed that the silent night-tide would never change and die;
But lo, how the dawn comes stealing o'er the mountains of the east,
And dim grows Atli's roof-sun o'er yestereven's feast;
Dim yet in the treasure-houses lie the ancient heaps of gold,
But slowly come the colours to the Dwarf-wrought rings of old:
Yet a while; and the day-light lingers: yea, yea, is it darker than erst?
Hath the day into night-tide drifted, the day by the twilight nursed?
Are the clouds in the house of King Atli? Or what shines brighter that morn,
In helms and shields of the ancient, and swords by dead kings borne?
Have the heavens come down to Atli? Hath his house been lifted on high,
Lest the pride of the triumphing World-King should fade in the world and die?
Lo, lo, in the hall of the Murder where the white-armed Gudrun stands,
Aloft by the kingly high-seat, and nought empty are her hands;
For the litten brand she beareth, and the grinded war-sword bare:
Still she stands for a little season till day groweth white and fair
Without the garth of King Atli; but within, a wavering cloud
Rolls, hiding the roof and the roof-sun; then she stirreth and crieth aloud:
“Alone was I yestereven: and alone in the night I lay,
And I thought on the ancient fathers, and longed for the dawning of day:
Then I rose from the bed of the Eastlands; to the Holy Hearth I went;
And lo, how the brands were abiding the hand of mine intent!
Then I caught them up with wisdom, with care I bore them forth,
And I laid them amidst of the treasures and dear things of uttermost worth;
'Neath the fair-dight benches I laid them and the carven work of the hall;
I was wise, as the handmaid arising ere the sun hath litten the wall,

When the brands on the hearth she lighteth that her work betimes she may win,
That her hand may toil unchidden, and her day with praise begin.

—Begin, O day of Atli! O ancient sun, arise,
With the light that I loved aforetime, with the light that blessed mine eyes,
When I woke and looked on Sigurd, and he rose on the world and shone!
And we twain in the world together! and I dwelt with Sigurd alone.”

She spake; and the sun clomb over the Eastland mountains’ rim
And shone through the door of Atli and the smoky hall and dim,
But the fire roared up against him, and the smoke-cloud rolled aloof,
And back and down from the timbers, and the carven work of the roof;
There the ancient trees were crackling as the red flames shot aloft
From the heart of the gathering smoke-cloud; there the far-fetched hangings soft,
The gold and the sea-born purple, shrank up in a moment of space,
And the walls of Atli trembled, and the ancient golden place.

But the wine-drenched earls were awaking, and the sleep-dazed warriors stirred,
And the light of their dawning was dreadful; wild voice of the day they heard,
And they knew not where they were gotten, and their hearts were smitten with dread,
And they deemed that their house was fallen to the innermost place of the dead,
The hall for the traitors builded, the house of the changeless plain;
They cried, and their tongues were confounded, and none gave answer again:
They rushed, and came nowhither; each man beheld his foe,
And smote as the hopeless and dying, nor brother brother might know,
The sons of one mother’s sorrow in the fire-blast strove and smote,
And the sword of the first-begotten was thrust in the father’s throat,
And the father hewed at his stripling; the thrall at the war-king cried,
And mocked the face of the mighty in that house of Atli’s pride.

There Gudrun stood o’er the turmoil; there stood the Niblung child;
As the battle-horn is dreadful, as the winter wind is wild,
So dread and shrill was her crying and the cry none heeded or heard,
As she shook the sword in the Eastland, and spake the hidden word:

“The brand for the flesh of the people, and the sword for the King of the world!”
Then adown the hall and the smoke-cloud the half-slaked torch she hurled
And strode to the chamber of Atli, white-fluttering mid the smoke;
But their eyen met in the doorway and he knew the hand and the stroke,
And shrank aback before her; and no hand might he upraise,
There was nought in his heart but anguish in that end of Atli’s days.

But she towered aloft before him, and cried in Atli’s home:
“Lo, lo, the day-light, Atli, and the last foe overcome!”
And with all the might of the Niblungs she thrust him through and fled,
And the flame was fleet behind her and hung o’er the face of the dead.

There was none to hinder Gudrun, and the fire-blast scathed her nought,
For the ways of the Norns she wended, and her feet from the wrack they brought
Till free from the bane of the East-folk, the swift pursuing flame,
To the uttermost wall of Atli and the side of the sea she came:
She stood on the edge of the steep, and no child of man was there:
A light wind blew from the sea-flood and its waves were little and fair,
And gave back no sign of the burning, as in twinkling haste they ran,
White-topped in the merry morning, to the walls and the havens of man.

Then Gudrun girded her raiment, on the edge of the steep she stood,
She looked o’er the shoreless water, and cried out o’er the measureless flood:
“O Sea, I stand before thee; and I who was Sigurd’s wife!
By his brightness unforgotten I bid thee deliver my life

From the deeds and the longing of days, and the lack I have won of the earth,
And the wrong amended by wrong, and the bitter wrong of my birth!"

She hath spread out her arms as she spake it, and away from the earth she leapt,
And cut off her tide of returning; for the sea-waves over her swept,
And their will is her will henceforward; and who knoweth the deeps of the sea,
And the wealth of the bed of Gudrun, and the days that yet shall be?

Ye have heard of Sigurd aforetime, how the foes of God he slew;
How forth from the darksome desert the Gold of the Waters he drew;
How he wake ned Love on the Mountain, and wakened Brynhild the Bright,
And dwelt upon Earth for a season, and shone in all men's sight.
Ye have heard of the Cloudy People, and the dimming of the day,
And the latter world's confusion, and Sigurd gone away;
Now ye know of the Need of the Niblungs and the end of broken troth,
All the death of kings and of kindreds and the sorrow of Odin the Goth.

Morris: House of the Wolfings

Whiles in the early Winter eve
We pass amid the gathering night
Some homestead that we had to leave
Years past; and see its candles bright
Shine in the room beside the door
Where we were merry years ago
But now must never enter more,
As still the dark road drives us on.
E'en so the world of men may turn
At even of some hurried day
And see the ancient glimmer burn
Across the waste that hath no way;
Then with that faint light in its eyes
A while I bid it linger near
And nurse in wavering memories
The bitter-sweet of days that were.

CHAPTER I—THE DWELLINGS OF MID-MARK

The tale tells that in times long past there was a dwelling of men beside a great wood. Before it lay a plain, not very great, but which was, as it were, an isle in the sea of woodland, since even when you stood on the flat ground, you could see trees everywhere in the offing, though as for hills, you could scarce say that there were any; only swellings-up of the earth here and there, like the upheavings of the water that one sees at whiles going on amidst the eddies of a swift but deep stream.

On either side, to right and left the tree-girdle reached out toward the blue distance, thick close and unsundered, save where it and the plain which it begirdled was cleft amidmost by a river about as wide as the Thames at Sheene when the flood-tide is at its highest, but so swift and full of eddies, that it gave token of mountains not so far distant, though they were hidden. On each side moreover of the stream of this river was a wide space of stones, great and little, and in most places above this stony waste were banks of a few feet high, showing where the yearly winter flood was most commonly stayed.

You must know that this great clearing in the woodland was not a matter of haphazard; though the river had driven a road whereby men might fare on each side of its hurrying stream. It was men who had made that Isle in the woodland.

For many generations the folk that now dwelt there had learned the craft of iron-founding, so that they had no lack of wares of iron and steel, whether they were tools of handicraft or weapons for hunting and for war. It was the men of the Folk, who coming adown by the river-side had made that clearing. The tale tells not whence they came, but belike from the dales of the distant mountains, and from dales and mountains and plains further aloof and yet further.

Anyhow they came adown the river; on its waters on rafts, by its shores in wains or be-striding their horses or their kine, or afoot, till they had a mind to abide; and there as it fell they stayed their travel, and spread from each side of the river, and fought with the wood and its wild things, that they might make to themselves a dwelling-place on the face of the earth.

So they cut down the trees, and burned their stumps that the grass might grow sweet for their kine and sheep and horses; and they diked the river where need was all through the plain, and far up into the wild-wood to bridle the winter floods: and they made them boats to ferry them over, and to float down stream and track up-stream: they fished the river's eddies also with net and with line; and drew drift from out of it of far-travelled wood and other matters; and the gravel of its shallows they washed for gold; and it became their friend, and they loved

it, and gave it a name, and called it the Dusky, and the Glassy, and the Mirkwood-water; for the names of it changed with the generations of man.

There then in the clearing of the wood that for many years grew greater yearly they drave their beasts to pasture in the new-made meadows, where year by year the grass grew sweeter as the sun shone on it and the standing waters went from it; and now in the year whereof the tale telleth it was a fair and smiling plain, and no folk might have a better meadow.

But long before that had they learned the craft of tillage and taken heed to the acres and begun to grow wheat and rye thereon round about their roofs; the spade came into their hands, and they bethought them of the plough-share, and the tillage spread and grew, and there was no lack of bread.

In such wise that Folk had made an island amidst of the Mirkwood, and established a home there, and upheld it with manifold toil too long to tell of. And from the beginning this clearing in the wood they called the Mid-mark: for you shall know that men might journey up and down the Mirkwood-water, and half a day's ride up or down they would come on another clearing or island in the woods, and these were the Upper-mark and the Nether-mark: and all these three were inhabited by men of one folk and one kindred, which was called the Mark-men, though of many branches was that stem of folk, who bore divers signs in battle and at the council whereby they might be known.

Now in the Mid-mark itself were many Houses of men; for by that word had they called for generations those who dwelt together under one token of kinship. The river ran from South to North, and both on the East side and on the West were there Houses of the Folk, and their habitations were shouldered up nigh unto the wood, so that ever betwixt them and the river was there a space of tillage and pasture.

Tells the tale of one such House, whose habitations were on the west side of the water, on a gentle slope of land, so that no flood higher than common might reach them. It was straight down to the river mostly that the land fell off, and on its downward-reaching slopes was the tillage, "the Acres," as the men of that time always called tilled land; and beyond that was the meadow going fair and smooth, though with here and there a rising in it, down to the lips of the stony waste of the winter river.

Now the name of this House was the Wolfings, and they bore a Wolf on their banners, and their warriors were marked on the breast with the image of the Wolf, that they might be known for what they were if they fell in battle, and were stripped.

The house, that is to say the Roof, of the Wolfings of the Mid-mark stood on the topmost of the slope aforesaid with its back to the wild-wood and its face to the acres and the water. But you must know that in those days the men of one branch of kindred dwelt under one roof together, and had therein their place and dignity; nor were there many degrees amongst them as hath befallen afterwards, but all they of one blood were brethren and of equal dignity. Howbeit they had servants or thralls, men taken in battle, men of alien blood, though true it is that from time to time were some of such men taken into the House, and hailed as brethren of the blood.

Also (to make an end at once of these matters of kinship and affinity) the men of one House might not wed the women of their own House: to the Wolfing men all Wolfing women were as sisters: they must needs wed with the Hartings or the Elings or the Bearings, or other such Houses of the Mark as were not so close akin to the blood of the Wolf; and this was a law that none dreamed of breaking. Thus then dwelt this Folk and such was their Custom.

As to the Roof of the Wolfings, it was a great hall and goodly, after the fashion of their folk and their day; not built of stone and lime, but framed of the goodliest trees of the wild-wood squared with the adze, and betwixt the framing filled with clay wattled with reeds. Long was that house, and at one end anigh the gable was the Man's-door, not so high that a man might stand on the threshold and his helmcrest clear the lintel; for such was the custom, that a tall man must bow himself as he came into the hall; which custom maybe was a memory of the days of onslaught when the foemen were mostly wont to beset the hall; whereas in the days whereof the tale tells they drew out into the fields and fought unfenced; unless at whiles when the odds were over great, and then they drew their wains about them and were fenced by the wain-burg. At least it was from no niggardry that the door was made thus low, as might be seen by the fair and manifold carving of knots and dragons that was wrought above the lintel of the door for some three foot's space. But a like door was there anigh the other gable-end, whereby the women entered, and it was called the Woman's-door.

Near to the house on all sides except toward the wood were there many bowers and cots round about the penfolds and the byres: and these were booths for the stowage of wares, and for crafts and smithying that were unhandy to do in the house; and withal they were the dwelling-places of the thralls. And the lads and young men often abode there many days and were cherished there of the thralls that loved them, since at whiles they shunned the Great Roof that they might be the freer to come and go at their pleasure, and deal as they would. Thus was there a clustering on the slopes and bents betwixt the acres of the Wolfings and the wild-wood wherein dwelt the wolves.

As to the house within, two rows of pillars went down it endlong, fashioned of the mightiest trees that might be found, and each one fairly wrought with base and chapter, and wreaths and knots, and fighting men and dragons; so that it was like a church of later days that has a nave and aisles: windows there were above the aisles, and a passage underneath the said windows in their roofs. In the aisles were the sleeping-places of the Folk, and down the nave under the crown of the roof were three hearths for the fires, and above each hearth a luffer or smoke-bearer to draw the smoke up when the fires were lighted. Forsooth on a bright winter afternoon it was strange to see the three columns of smoke going wavering up to the dimness of the mighty roof, and one maybe smitten athwart by the sunbeams. As for the timber of the roof itself and its framing, so exceeding great and high it was, that the tale tells how that none might see the fashion of it from the hall-floor unless he were to raise aloft a blazing faggot on a long pole: since no lack of timber was there among the men of the Mark.

At the end of the hall anigh the Man's-door was the dais, and a table thereon set thwartwise of the hall; and in front of the dais was the noblest and greatest of the hearths; (but of the others one was in the very midmost, and another in the Woman's-Chamber) and round about the dais, along the gable-wall, and hung from pillar to pillar were woven cloths pictured with images of ancient tales and the deeds of the Wolfings, and the deeds of the Gods from whence they came. And this was the fairest place of all the house and the best-beloved of the Folk, and especially of the older and the mightier men: and there were tales told, and songs sung, especially if they were new: and thereto also were messengers brought if any tidings were abroad: there also would the elders talk together about matters concerning the House or the Mid-mark or the whole Folk of the Markmen.

Yet you must not think that their solemn councils were held there, the folk-motes whereat it must be determined what to do and what to forbear doing; for according as such councils, (which they called Things) were of the House or of the Mid-mark or of the whole Folk, were they held each at the due Thing-steads in the Wood aloof from either acre or meadow, (as was the custom of our forefathers for long after) and at such Things would all the men of the House or the Mid-mark or the Folk be present man by man. And in each of these steads was there a Doomring wherein Doom was given by the neighbours chosen, (whom now we call the Jury) in matters between man and man; and no such doom of neighbours was given, and no such voice of the Folk proclaimed in any house or under any roof, nor even as aforesaid on the tilled acres or the depastured meadows. This was the custom of our forefathers, in memory, belike, of the days when as yet there was neither house nor tillage, nor flocks and herds, but the Earth's face only and what freely grew thereon.

But over the dais there hung by chains and pulleys fastened to a tie-beam of the roof high aloft a wondrous lamp fashioned of glass; yet of no such glass as the folk made then and there, but of a fair and clear green like an emerald, and all done with figures and knots in gold, and strange beasts, and a warrior slaying a dragon, and the sun rising on the earth: nor did any tale tell whence this lamp came, but it was held as an ancient and holy thing by all the Markmen, and the kindred of the Wolf had it in charge to keep a light burning in it night and day for ever; and they appointed a maiden of their own kindred to that office; which damsel must needs be unwedded, since no wedded woman dwelling under that roof could be a Wolfing woman, but would needs be of the houses wherein the Wolfings wedded.

This lamp which burned ever was called the Hall-Sun, and the woman who had charge of it, and who was the fairest that might be found was called after it the Hall-Sun also.

At the other end of the hall was the Woman's-Chamber, and therein were the looms and other gear for the carding and spinning of wool and the weaving of cloth.

Such was the Roof under which dwelt the kindred of the Wolfings; and the other kindreds of the Mid-mark had roofs like to it; and of these the chiefest were the Elkings, the Vallings, the Alftings, the Beamings, the Galtings, and the Bearings; who bore on their banners the Elk, the

Falcon, the Swan, the Tree, the Boar, and the Bear. But other lesser and newer kindreds there were than these: as for the Hartings above named, they were a kindred of the Upper-mark.

CHAPTER II—THE FLITTING OF THE WAR-ARROW

Tells the tale that it was an evening of summer, when the wheat was in the ear, but yet green; and the neat-herds were done driving the milch-kine to the byre, and the horseherds and the shepherd had made the night-shift, and the out-goers were riding two by two and one by one through the lanes between the wheat and the rye towards the meadow. Round the cots of the thralls were gathered knots of men and women both thralls and freemen, some talking together, some hearkening a song or a tale, some singing and some dancing together; and the children gambolling about from group to group with their shrill and tuneless voices, like young throstles who have not yet learned the song of their race. With these were mingled dogs, dun of colour, long of limb, sharp-nosed, gaunt and great; they took little heed of the children as they pulled them about in their play, but lay down, or loitered about, as though they had forgotten the chase and the wild-wood.

Merry was the folk with that fair tide, and the promise of the harvest, and the joy of life, and there was no weapon among them so close to the houses, save here and there the boar-spear of some herdman or herd-woman late come from the meadow.

Tall and for the most part comely were both men and women; the most of them light-haired and grey-eyed, with cheek-bones somewhat high; white of skin but for the sun's burning, and the wind's parching, and whereas they were tanned of a very ruddy and cheerful hue. But the thralls were some of them of a shorter and darker breed, black-haired also and dark-eyed, lighter of limb; sometimes better knit, but sometimes crooked of leg and knottier of arm. But some also were of build and hue not much unlike to the freemen; and these doubtless came of some other Folk of the Goths which had given way in battle before the Men of the Mark, either they or their fathers.

Moreover some of the freemen were unlike their fellows and kindred, being slenderer and closer-knit, and black-haired, but grey-eyed withal; and amongst these were one or two who exceeded in beauty all others of the House.

Now the sun was set and the glooming was at point to begin and the shadowless twilight lay upon the earth. The nightingales on the borders of the wood sang ceaselessly from the scattered hazel-trees above the greensward where the grass was cropped down close by the nibbling of the rabbits; but in spite of their song and the divers voices of the men-folk about the houses, it was an evening on which sounds from aloof can be well heard, since noises carry far at such tides.

Suddenly they who were on the edges of those throngs and were the less noisy, held themselves as if to listen; and a group that had gathered about a minstrel to hear his story fell hearkening also round about the silenced and hearkening tale-teller: some of the dancers and singers noted them and in their turn stayed the dance and kept silence to hearken; and so from group to group spread the change, till all were straining their ears to hearken the tidings. Already the men of the night-shift had heard it, and the shepherds of them had turned about, and were trotting smartly back through the lanes of the tall wheat: but the horse-herds were now scarce seen on the darkening meadow, as they galloped on fast toward their herds to drive home the stallions. For what they had heard was the tidings of war.

There was a sound in the air as of a humble-bee close to the ear of one lying on a grassy bank; or whiles as of a cow afar in the meadow lowing in the afternoon when milking-time draws nigh: but it was ever shriller than the one, and fuller than the other; for it changed at whiles, though after the first sound of it, it did not rise or fall, because the eve was windless. You might hear at once that for all it was afar, it was a great and mighty sound; nor did any that hearkened doubt what it was, but all knew it for the blast of the great war-horn of the Elkings, whose Roof lay up Mirkwood-water next to the Roof of the Wolfings.

So those little throngs broke up at once; and all the freemen, and of the thralls a good many, flocked, both men and women, to the Man's-door of the hall, and streamed in quietly and with little talk, as men knowing that they should hear all in due season.

Within under the Hall-Sun, amidst the woven stories of time past, sat the elders and chief warriors on the dais, and amidst of all a big strong man of forty winters, his dark beard a little grizzled, his eyes big and grey. Before him on the board lay the great War-horn of the Wolfings carved out of the tusk of a sea-whale of the North and with many devices on it and

the Wolf amidst them all; its golden mouth-piece and rim wrought finely with flowers. There it abode the blowing, until the spoken word of some messenger should set forth the tidings borne on the air by the horn of the Elkins.

But the name of the dark-haired chief was Thiodolf (to wit Folk-wolf) and he was deemed the wisest man of the Wolfings, and the best man of his hands, and of heart most dauntless. Beside him sat the fair woman called the Hall-Sun; for she was his foster-daughter before men's eyes; and she was black-haired and grey-eyed like to her fosterer, and never was woman fashioned fairer: she was young of years, scarce twenty winters old.

There sat the chiefs and elders on the dais, and round about stood the kindred intermingled with the thralls, and no man spake, for they were awaiting sure and certain tidings: and when all were come in who had a mind to, there was so great a silence in the hall, that the song of the nightingales on the wood-edge sounded clear and loud therein, and even the chink of the bats about the upper windows could be heard. Then amidst the hush of men-folk, and the sounds of the life of the earth came another sound that made all turn their eyes toward the door; and this was the pad-pad of one running on the trodden and summer-dried ground anigh the hall: it stopped for a moment at the Man's-door, and the door opened, and the throng parted, making way for the man that entered and came hastily up to the midst of the table that stood on the dais athwart the hall, and stood there panting, holding forth in his outstretched hand something which not all could see in the dimness of the hall-twilight, but which all knew nevertheless. The man was young, lithe and slender, and had no raiment but linen breeches round his middle, and skin shoes on his feet. As he stood there gathering his breath for speech, Thiodolf stood up, and poured mead into a drinking horn and held it out towards the new-comer, and spake, but in rhyme and measure:

"Welcome, thou evening-farer, and holy be thine head,
Since thou hast sought unto us in the heart of the Wolfings' stead;
Drink now of the horn of the mighty, and call a health if thou wilt
O'er the eddies of the mead-horn to the washing out of guilt.
For thou com'st to the peace of the Wolfings, and our very guest thou art,
And meseems as I behold thee, that I look on a child of the Hart."

But the man put the horn from him with a hasty hand, and none said another word to him until he had gotten his breath again; and then he said:

"All hail ye Wood-Wolfs' children! nought may I drink the wine,
For the mouth and the maw that I carry this eve are nought of mine;
And my feet are the feet of the people, since the word went forth that tide,
'O Elf here of the Hartings, no longer shalt thou bide
In any house of the Markmen than to speak the word and wend,
Till all men know the tidings and thine errand hath an end.'
Behold, O Wolves, the token and say if it be true!
I bear the shaft of battle that is four-wise cloven through,
And its each end dipped in the blood-stream, both the iron and the horn,
And its midmost scathed with the fire; and the word that I have borne
Along with this war-token is, 'Wolfings of the Mark
Whenso ye see the war-shaft, by the daylight or the dark,
Busk ye to battle faring, and leave all work undone
Save the gathering for the handplay at the rising of the sun.
Three days hence is the hosting, and thither bear along
Your wains and your kine for the slaughter lest the journey should be long.
For great is the Folk, saith the tidings, that against the Markmen come;
In a far off land is their dwelling, whenso they sit at home,
And Welsh is their tongue, and we wot not of the word that is in their mouth,
As they march a many together from the cities of the South.'"

Therewith he held up yet for a minute the token of the war-arrow ragged and burnt and bloody; and turning about with it in his hand went his ways through the open door, none hindering; and when he was gone, it was as if the token were still in the air there against the heads of the living men, and the heads of the woven warriors, so intently had all gazed at it; and none doubted the tidings or the token. Then said Thiodolf:

"Forth will we Wolfing children, and cast a sound abroad:
The mouth of the sea-beast's weapon shall speak the battle-word;
And ye warriors hearken and hasten, and dight the weed of war,
And then to acre and meadow wend ye adown no more,
For this work shall be for the women to drive our neat from the mead,
And to yoke the wains, and to load them as the men of war have need."

Out then they streamed from the hall, and no man was left therein save the fair Hall-Sun sitting under the lamp whose name she bore. But to the highest of the slope they went, where was a mound made higher by man's handiwork; thereon stood Thiodolf and handled the horn,

turning his face toward the downward course of Mirkwood-water; and he set the horn to his lips, and blew a long blast, and then again, and yet again the third time; and all the sounds of the gathering night were hushed under the sound of the roaring of the war-horn of the Wolfings; and the Kin of the Beamings heard it as they sat in their hall, and they gat them ready to hearken to the bearer of the tidings who should follow on the sound of the war-blast.

But when the last sound of the horn had died away, then said Thiodolf:

"Now Wolfing children hearken, what the splintered War-shaft saith,
The fire scathed blood-stained aspen! we shall ride for life or death,
We warriors, a long journey with the herd and with the wain;
But unto this our homestead shall we wend us back again,
All the gleanings of the battle; and here for them that live
Shall stand the Roof of the Wolfings, and for them shall the meadow thrive,
And the acres give their increase in the harvest of the year;
Now is no long departing since the Hall-Sun bideth here
'Neath the holy Roof of the Fathers, and the place of the Wolfing kin,
And the feast of our glad returning shall yet be held therein.
Hear the bidding of the War-shaft! All men, both thralls and free,
'Twixt twenty winters and sixty, beneath the shield shall be,
And the hosting is at the Thing-stead, the Upper-mark anigh;
And we wend away to-morrow ere the Sun is noon-tide high."

Therewith he stepped down from the mound, and went his way back to the hall; and manifold talk arose among the folk; and of the warriors some were already dight for the journey, but most not, and a many went their ways to see to their weapons and horses, and the rest back again into the hall.

By this time night had fallen, and between then and the dawning would be no darker hour, for the moon was just rising; a many of the horse-herds had done their business, and were now making their way back again through the lanes of the wheat, driving the stallions before them, who played together kicking, biting and squealing, paying but little heed to the standing corn on either side. Lights began to glitter now in the cots of the thralls, and brighter still in the stithies where already you might hear the hammers clinking on the anvils, as men fell to looking to their battle gear.

But the chief men and the women sat under their Roof on the eve of departure: and the tuns of mead were broached, and the horns filled and borne round by young maidens, and men ate and drank and were merry; and from time to time as some one of the warriors had done with giving heed to his weapons, he entered into the hall and fell into the company of those whom he loved most and by whom he was best beloved; and whiles they talked, and whiles they sang to the harp up and down that long house; and the moon risen high shone in at the windows, and there was much laughter and merriment, and talk of deeds of arms of the old days on the eve of that departure: till little by little weariness fell on them, and they went their ways to slumber, and the hall was fallen silent.

CHAPTER III—THIODOLF TALKETH WITH THE WOOD-SUN

But yet sat Thiodolf under the Hall-Sun for a while as one in deep thought; till at last as he stirred, his sword clattered on him; and then he lifted up his eyes and looked down the hall and saw no man stirring, so he stood up and settled his raiment on him, and went forth, and so took his ways through the hall-door, as one who hath an errand.

The moonlight lay in a great flood on the grass without, and the dew was falling in the coldest hour of the night, and the earth smelled sweetly: the whole habitation was asleep now, and there was no sound to be known as the sound of any creature, save that from the distant meadow came the lowing of a cow that had lost her calf, and that a white owl was flitting about near the eaves of the Roof with her wild cry that sounded like the mocking of merriment now silent.

Thiodolf turned toward the wood, and walked steadily through the scattered hazel-trees, and thereby into the thick of the beech-trees, whose boles grew smooth and silver-grey, high and close-set: and so on and on he went as one going by a well-known path, though there was no path, till all the moonlight was quenched under the close roof of the beech-leaves, though yet for all the darkness, no man could go there and not feel that the roof was green above him. Still he went on in despite of the darkness, till at last there was a glimmer before him, that grew greater till he came unto a small wood-lawn whereon the turf grew again, though the grass was but thin, because little sunlight got to it, so close and thick were the tall trees round about it. In the heavens above it by now there was a light that was not all of the moon, though it might scarce be told whether that light were the memory of yesterday or

the promise of to-morrow, since little of the heavens could be seen thence, save the crown of them, because of the tall tree-tops.

Nought looked Thiodolf either at the heavens above, or the trees, as he strode from off the husk-strewn floor of the beech wood on to the scanty grass of the lawn, but his eyes looked straight before him at that which was amidmost of the lawn: and little wonder was that; for there on a stone chair sat a woman exceeding fair, clad in glittering raiment, her hair lying as pale in the moonlight on the grey stone as the barley acres in the August night before the reaping-hook goes in amongst them. She sat there as though she were awaiting someone, and he made no stop nor stay, but went straight up to her, and took her in his arms, and kissed her mouth and her eyes, and she him again; and then he sat himself down beside her. But her eyes looked kindly on him as she said:

“O Thiodolf, hardy art thou, that thou hast no fear to take me in thine arms and to kiss me, as though thou hadst met in the meadow with a maiden of the Elkins: and I, who am a daughter of the Gods of thy kindred, and a Chooser of the Slain! Yea, and that upon the eve of battle and the dawn of thy departure to the stricken field!”

“O Wood-Sun,” he said “thou art the treasure of life that I found when I was young, and the love of life that I hold, now that my beard is grizzling. Since when did I fear thee, Wood-Sun? Did I fear thee when first I saw thee, and we stood amidst the hazelled field, we twain living amongst the slain? But my sword was red with the blood of the foe, and my raiment with mine own blood; and I was a-weary with the day’s work, and sick with many strokes, and methought I was fainting into death. And there thou wert before me, full of life and ruddy and smiling both lips and eyes; thy raiment clean and clear, thine hands stained with blood: then didst thou take me by my bloody and weary hand, and didst kiss my lips grown ashen pale, and thou saidst ‘Come with me.’ And I strove to go, and might not; so many and sore were my hurts. Then amidst my sickness and my weariness was I merry; for I said to myself, This is the death of the warrior, and it is exceeding sweet. What meaneth it? Folk said of me; he is over young to meet the foeman; yet am I not over young to die?”

Therewith he laughed out amid the wild-wood, and his speech became song, and he said:

“We wrought in the ring of the hazels, and the wine of war we drank:
From the tide when the sun stood highest to the hour wherein she sank:
And three kings came against me, the mightiest of the Huns,
The evil-eyed in battle, the swift-foot wily ones;
And they gnashed their teeth against me, and they gnawed on the shield-rims there,
On that afternoon of summer, in the high-tide of the year.
Keen-eyed I gazed about me, and I saw the clouds draw up
Till the heavens were dark as the hollow of a wine-stained iron cup,
And the wild-deer lay unfeeding on the grass of the forest glades,
And all earth was scared with the thunder above our clashing blades.
“Then sank a King before me, and on fell the other twain,
And I tossed up the reddened sword-blade in the gathered rush of the rain
And the blood and the water blended, and fragrant grew the earth.
“There long I turned and twisted within the battle-girth
Before those bears of onset: while out from the grey world streamed
The broad red lash of the lightening and in our byrnies gleamed.
And long I leapt and laboured in that garland of the fight
’Mid the blue blades and the lightening; but ere the sky grew light
The second of the Hun-kings on the rain-drenched daisies lay;
And we twain with the battle blinded a little while made stay,
And leaning on our sword-hilts each on the other gazed.
“Then the rain grew less, and one corner of the veil of clouds was raised,
And as from the brodered covering gleams out the shoulder white
Of the bed-mate of the warrior when on his wedding night
He layeth his hand to the linen; so, down there in the west
Gleamed out the naked heaven: but the wrath rose up in my breast,
And the sword in my hand rose with it, and I leaped and hewed at the Hun;
And from him too flared the war-flame, and the blades danced bright in the sun
Come back to the earth for a little before the ending of day.
“There then with all that was in him did the Hun play out the play,
Till he fell, and left me tottering, and I turned my feet to wend
To the place of the mound of the mighty, the gate of the way without end.
And there thou wert. How was it, thou Chooser of the Slain,
Did I die in thine arms, and thereafter did thy mouth-kiss wake me again?”

Ere the last sound of his voice was done she turned and kissed him; and then she said; “Never hadst thou a fear and thine heart is full of hardihood.”

Then he said:

“’Tis the hardy heart, beloved, that keepeth me alive,
As the king-leek in the garden by the rain and the sun doth thrive,

So I thrive by the praise of the people; it is blent with my drink and my meat;
 As I slumber in the night-tide it laps me soft and sweet;
 And through the chamber window when I waken in the morn
 With the wind of the sun's arising from the meadow is it borne
 And biddeth me remember that yet I live on earth:
 Then I rise and my might is with me, and fills my heart with mirth,
 As I think of the praise of the people; and all this joy I win
 By the deeds that my heart commandeth and the hope that lieth therein."

"Yea," she said, "but day runneth ever on the heels of day, and there are many and many days; and betwixt them do they carry eld."

"Yet art thou no older than in days bygone," said he. "Is it so, O Daughter of the Gods, that thou wert never born, but wert from before the framing of the mountains, from the beginning of all things?"

But she said:

"Nay, nay; I began, I was born; although it may be indeed
 That not on the hills of the earth I sprang from the godhead's seed.
 And e'en as my birth and my waxing shall be my waning and end.
 But thou on many an errand, to many a field dost wend
 Where the bow at adventure bended, or the fleeing dastard's spear
 Oft lulleth the mirth of the mighty. Now me thou dost not fear,
 Yet fear with me, beloved, for the mighty Maid I fear;
 And Doom is her name, and full often she maketh me afraid
 And even now meseemeth on my life her hand is laid."

But he laughed and said:

"In what land is she abiding? Is she near or far away?
 Will she draw up close beside me in the press of the battle play?
 And if then I may not smite her 'midst the warriors of the field
 With the pale blade of my fathers, will she bide the shove of my shield?"

But sadly she sang in answer:

"In many a stead Doom dwelleth, nor sleepeth day nor night:
 The rim of the bowl she kisseth, and beareth the chambering light
 When the kings of men wend happy to the bride-bed from the board.
 It is little to say that she wendeth the edge of the grinded sword,
 When about the house half builded she hangeth many a day;
 The ship from the strand she shoveth, and on his wonted way
 By the mountain-hunter fareth where his foot ne'er failed before:
 She is where the high bank crumbles at last on the river's shore:
 The mower's scythe she whetteth; and lulleth the shepherd to sleep
 Where the deadly ling-worm wakeneth in the desert of the sheep.
 Now we that come of the God-kin of her reds for ourselves we wot,
 But her will with the lives of men-folk and their ending know we not.
 So therefore I bid thee not fear for thyself of Doom and her deed,
 But for me: and I bid thee hearken to the helping of my need.
 Or else—Art thou happy in life, or lusteth thou to die
 In the flower of thy days, when thy glory and thy longing bloom on high?"

But Thiodolf answered her:

"I have deemed, and long have I deemed that this is my second life,
 That my first one waned with my wounding when thou cam'st to the ring of strife.
 For when in thine arms I wakened on the hazelled field of yore,
 Meseemed I had newly arisen to a world I knew no more,
 So much had all things brightened on that dewy dawn of day.
 It was dark dull death that I looked for when my thought had died away.
 It was lovely life that I woke to; and from that day henceforth
 My joy of the life of man-folk was manifolded of worth.
 Far fairer the fields of the morning than I had known them erst,
 And the acres where I wended, and the corn with its half-slaked thirst;
 And the noble Roof of the Wolfings, and the hawks that sat thereon;
 And the bodies of my kindred whose deliverance I had won;
 And the glimmering of the Hall-Sun in the dusky house of old;
 And my name in the mouth of the maidens, and the praises of the bold,
 As I sat in my battle-raiment, and the ruddy spear well steeled
 Leaned 'gainst my side war-battered, and the wounds thine hand had healed.
 Yea, from that morn thenceforward has my life been good indeed,
 The gain of to-day was goodly, and good to-morrow's need,
 And good the whirl of the battle, and the broil I wielded there,
 Till I fashioned the ordered onset, and the unhoped victory fair.
 And good were the days thereafter of utter deedless rest
 And the prattle of thy daughter, and her hands on my unmailed breast.
 Ah good is the life thou hast given, the life that mine hands have won.
 And where shall be the ending till the world is all undone?
 Here sit we twain together, and both we in Godhead clad,
 We twain of the Wolfing kindred, and each of the other glad."

But she answered, and her face grew darker withal:

“O mighty man and joyous, art thou of the Wolfing kin?
 ’Twas no evil deed when we mingled, nor lieth doom therein.
 Thou lovely man, thou black-haired, thou shalt die and have done no ill.
 Fame-crowned are the deeds of thy doing, and the mouths of men they fill.
 Thou betterer of the Godfolk, enduring is thy fame:
 Yet as a painted image of a dream is thy dreaded name.
 Of an alien folk thou comest, that we twain might be one indeed.
 Thou shalt die one day. So hearken, to help me at my need.”

His face grew troubled and he said: “What is this word that I am no chief of the Wolfings?”

“Nay,” she said, “but better than they. Look thou on the face of our daughter the Hall-Sun, thy daughter and mine: favouresth she at all of me?”

He laughed: “Yea, whereas she is fair, but not otherwise. This is a hard saying, that I dwell among an alien kindred, and it wotteth not thereof. Why hast thou not told me hereof before?”

She said: “It needed not to tell thee because thy day was waxing, as now it waneth. Once more I bid thee hearken and do my bidding though it be hard to thee.”

He answered: “Even so will I as much as I may; and thus wise must thou look upon it, that I love life, and fear not death.”

Then she spake, and again her words fell into rhyme:

“In forty fights hast thou foughten, and been worsted but in four;
 And I looked on and was merry; and ever more and more
 Wert thou dear to the heart of the Wood-Sun, and the Chooser of the Slain.
 But now whereas ye are wending with slaughter-herd and wain
 To meet a folk that ye know not, a wonder, a peerless foe,
 I fear for thy glory’s waning, and I see thee lying alow.”

Then he brake in: “Herein is little shame to be worsted by the might of the mightiest: if this so mighty folk sheareth a limb off the tree of my fame, yet shall it wax again.”

But she sang:

“In forty fights hast thou foughten, and beside thee who but I
 Beheld the wind-tossed banners, and saw the aspen fly?
 But to-day to thy war I wend not, for Weird withholdeth me
 And sore my heart forebodeth for the battle that shall be.
 To-day with thee I wend not; so I feared, and lo my feet,
 That are wont to the woodland girdle of the acres of the wheat,
 For thee among strange people and the foeman’s throng have trod,
 And I tell thee their banner of battle is a wise and a mighty God.
 For these are the folk of the cities, and in wondrous wise they dwell
 ’Mid confusion of heaped houses, dim and black as the face of hell;
 Though therefrom rise roofs most goodly, where their captains and their kings
 Dwell amidst the walls of marble in abundance of fair things;
 And ’mid these, nor worser nor better, but builded otherwise
 Stand the Houses of the Fathers, and the hidden mysteries.
 And as close as are the tree-trunks that within the beech-wood thrive
 E’en so many are their pillars; and therein like men alive
 Stand the images of god-folk in such raiment as they wore
 In the years before the cities and the hidden days of yore.
 Ah for the gold that I gazed on! and their store of battle gear,
 And strange engines that I knew not, or the end for which they were.
 Ah for the ordered wisdom of the war-array of these,
 And the folks that are sitting about them in dumb down-trodden peace!
 So I thought now fareth war-ward my well-beloved friend,
 And the weird of the Gods hath doomed it that no more with him may I wend!
 Woe’s me for the war of the Wolfings wherefrom I am sundered apart,
 And the fruitless death of the war-wise, and the doom of the hardy heart!”

Then he answered, and his eyes grew kind as he looked on her:

“For thy fair love I thank thee, and thy faithful word, O friend!
 But how might it otherwise happen but we twain must meet in the end,
 The God of this mighty people and the Markmen and their kin?
 Lo, this is the weird of the world, and what may we do herein?”

Then mirth came into her face again as she said:

“Who wotteth of Weird, and what she is till the weird is accomplished? Long hath it been my weird to love thee and to fashion deeds for thee as I may; nor will I depart from it now.” And she sang:

“Keen-edged is the sword of the city, and bitter is its spear,
 But thy breast in the battle, beloved, hath a wall of the stithy’s gear.
 What now is thy wont in the handplay with the helm and the hauberk of rings?
 Farest thou as the thrall and the cot-carle, or clad in the raiment of kings?”

He started, and his face reddened as he answered:

“O Wood-Sun thou wottest our battle and the way wherein we fare:
That oft at the battle’s beginning the helm and the hauberk we bear;
Lest the shaft of the fleeing coward or the bow at adventure bent
Should slay us ere the need be, ere our might be given and spent.
Yet oft ere the fight is over, and Doom hath scattered the foe,
No leader of the people by his war-gear shall ye know,
But by his hurts the rather, from the cot-carle and the thrall:
For when all is done that a man may, ’tis the hour for a man to fall.”

She yet smiled as she said in answer:

“O Folk-wolf, heed and hearken; for when shall thy life be spent
And the Folk wherein thou dwellest with thy death be well content?
Whenso folk need the fire, do they hew the apple-tree,
And burn the Mother of Blossom and the fruit that is to be?
Or me wilt thou bid to thy grave-mound because thy battle-wrath
May nothing more be bridled than the whirl wind on his path?
So hearken and do my bidding, for the hauberk shalt thou bear
E’en when the other warriors cast off their battle-gear.
So come thou, come unwounded from the war-field of the south,
And sit with me in the beech-wood, and kiss me, eyes and mouth.”

And she kissed him in very deed, and made much of him, and fawned on him, and laid her hand on his breast, and he was soft and blithe with her, but at last he laughed and said:

“God’s Daughter, long hast thou lived, and many a matter seen,
And men full often grieving for the deed that might have been;
But here my heart thou wheedlest as a maid of tender years
When first in the arms of her darling the horn of war she hears.
Thou knowest the axe to be heavy, and the sword, how keen it is;
But that Doom of which thou hast spoken, wilt thou not tell of this,
God’s Daughter, how it sheareth, and how it breaketh through
Each wall that the warrior buildeth, yea all deeds that he may do?
What might in the hammer’s leavings, in the fire’s thrall shall abide
To turn that Folks’ o’erwhelmer from the fated warrior’s side?”

Then she laughed in her turn, and loudly; but so sweetly that the sound of her voice mingled with the first song of a newly awakened wood-thrush sitting on a rowan twig on the edge of the Wood-lawn. But she said:

“Yea, I that am God’s Daughter may tell thee never a whit
From what land cometh the hauberk nor what smith smithied it,
That thou shalt wear in the handplay from the first stroke to the last;
But this thereof I tell thee, that it holdeth firm and fast
The life of the body it lappeth, if the gift of the Godfolk it be.
Lo this is the yoke-mate of doom, and the gift of me unto thee.”

Then she leaned down from the stone whereon they sat, and her hand was in the dewy grass for a little, and then it lifted up a dark grey rippling coat of rings; and she straightened herself in the seat again, and laid that hauberk on the knees of Thiodolf, and he put his hand to it, and turned it about, while he pondered long; then at last he said:

“What evil thing abideth with this warder of the strife,
This burg and treasure chamber for the hoarding of my life?
For this is the work of the dwarfs, and no kindly kin of the earth;
And all we fear the dwarf-kin and their anger and sorrow and mirth.”

She cast her arms about him and fondled him, and her voice grew sweeter than the voice of any mortal thing as she answered:

“No ill for thee, beloved, or for me in the hauberk lies;
No sundering grief is in it, no lonely miseries.
But we shall abide together, and that new life I gave,
For a long while yet henceforward we twain its joy shall have.
Yea, if thou dost my bidding to wear my gift in the fight
No hunter of the wild-wood at the changing of the night
Shall see my shape on thy grave-mound or my tears in the morning find
With the dew of the morning mingled; nor with the evening wind
Shall my body pass the shepherd as he wandereth in the mead
And fill him with forebodings on the eve of the Wolfings’ need.
Nor the horse-herd wake in the midnight and hear my fateful cry;
Nor yet shall the Wofling women hear words on the wind go by
As they weave and spin the night down when the House is gone to the war,
And weep for the swains they wedded and the children that they bore.
Yea do my bidding, O Folk-wolf, lest a grief of the Gods should weigh
On the ancient House of the Wolfings and my death o’ercloud its day.”

And still she clung about him, while he spake no word of yea or nay: but at the last he let himself glide wholly into her arms, and the dwarf-wrought hauberk fell from his knees and lay on the grass.

So they abode together in that wood-lawn till the twilight was long gone, and the sun arisen for some while. And when Thiodolf stepped out of the beech-wood into the broad sunshine dappled with the shadow of the leaves of the hazels moving gently in the fresh morning air, he was covered from the neck to the knee by a hauberk of rings dark and grey and gleaming, fashioned by the dwarfs of ancient days.

CHAPTER IV—THE HOUSE FARETH TO THE WAR

Now when Thiodolf came back to the habitations of the kindred the whole House was astir, both thrall-men and women, and free women hurrying from cot to stithy, and from stithy to hall bearing the last of the war-gear or raiment for the fighting-men. But they for their part were some standing about anigh the Man's-door, some sitting gravely within the hall, some watching the hurry of the thralls and women from the midmost of the open space amidst of the habitations, whereon there stood yet certain wains which were belated: for the most of the wains were now standing with the oxen already yoked to them down in the meadow past the acres, encircled by a confused throng of kine and horses and thrall-folk, for thither had all the beasts for the slaughter, and the horses for the warriors been brought; and there were the horses tethered or held by the thralls; some indeed were already saddled and bridled, and on others were the thralls doing the harness.

But as for the wains of the Markmen, they were stoutly framed of ash-tree with panels of aspen, and they were broad-wheeled so that they might go over rough and smooth. They had high tilts over them well framed of willow-poles covered over with squares of black felt overlapping like shingles; which felt they made of the rough of their fleeces, for they had many sheep. And these wains were to them for houses upon the way if need were, and therein as now were stored their meal and their war-store and after fight they would flit their wounded men in them, such as were too sorely hurt to back a horse: nor must it be hidden that whiles they looked to bring back with them the treasure of the south. Moreover the folk if they were worsted in any battle, instead of fleeing without more done, would often draw back fighting into a garth made by these wains, and guarded by some of their thralls; and there would abide the onset of those who had thrust them back in the field. And this garth they called the Wain-burg.

So now stood three of these wains aforesaid belated amidst of the habitations of the House, their yoke-beasts standing or lying down unharnessed as yet to them: but in the very midst of that place was a wain unlike to them; smaller than they but higher; square of shape as to the floor of it; built lighter than they, yet far stronger; as the warrior is stronger than the big carle and trencher-licker that loiters about the hall; and from the midst of this wain arose a mast made of a tall straight fir-tree, and thereon hung the banner of the Wolfings, wherein was wrought the image of the Wolf, but red of hue as a token of war, and with his mouth open and gaping upon the foemen. Also whereas the other wains were drawn by mere oxen, and those of divers colours, as chance would have it, the wain of the banner was drawn by ten black bulls of the mightiest of the herd, deep-dewlapped, high-crested and curly-browed; and their harness was decked with gold, and so was the wain itself, and the woodwork of it painted red with vermillion. There then stood the Banner of the House of the Wolfings awaiting the departure of the warriors to the hosting.

So Thiodolf stood on the top of the bent beside that same mound wherefrom he had blown the War-horn yester-eve, and which was called the Hill of Speech, and he shaded his eyes with his hand and looked around him; and even therewith the carles fell to yoking the beasts to the belated wains, and the warriors gathered together from out of the mixed throngs, and came from the Roof and the Man's-door and all set their faces toward the Hill of Speech.

So Thiodolf knew that all was ready for departure, and it wanted but an hour of high-noon; so he turned about and went into the Hall, and there found his shield and his spear hanging in his sleeping place beside the hauberk he was wont to wear; then he looked, as one striving with thought, at his empty hauberk and his own body covered with the dwarf-wrought rings; nor did his face change as he took his shield and his spear and turned away. Then he went to the dais and there sat his foster-daughter (as men deemed her) sitting amidst of it as yester-eve, and now arrayed in a garment of fine white wool, on the breast whereof were wrought in gold two beasts ramping up against a fire-altar whereon a flame flickered; and on the skirts

and the hems were other devices, of wolves chasing deer, and men shooting with the bow; and that garment was an ancient treasure; but she had a broad girdle of gold and gems about her middle, and on her arms and neck she wore great gold rings wrought delicately. By then there were few save the Hall-Sun under the Roof, and they but the oldest of the women, or a few very old men, and some who were ailing and might not go abroad. But before her on the thwart table lay the Great War-horn awaiting the coming of Thiodolf to give signal of departure.

Then went Thiodolf to the Hall-Sun and kissed and embraced her fondly, and she gave the horn into his hands, and he went forth and up on to the Hill of Speech, and blew thence a short blast on the horn, and then came all the Warriors flocking to the Hill of Speech, each man stark in his harness, alert and joyous.

Then presently through the Man's-door came the Hall-Sun in that ancient garment, which fell straight and stiff down to her ancles as she stepped lightly and slowly along, her head crowned with a garland of eglantine. In her right hand also she held a great torch of wax lighted, whose flame amidst the bright sunlight looked like a wavering leaf of vermilion.

The warriors saw her, and made a lane for her, and she made her way through it up to the Hill of Speech, and she went up to the top of it and stood there holding the lighted candle in her hand, so that all might see it. Then suddenly was there as great a silence as there may be on a forenoon of summer; for even the thralls down in the meadow had noted what was toward, and ceased their talking and shouting, for as far off as they were, since they could see that the Hall-Sun stood on the Hill of Speech, for the wood was dark behind her; so they knew the Farewell Flame was lighted, and that the maiden would speak; and to all men her speech was a boding of good or of ill.

So she began in a sweet voice yet clear and far-reaching:

"O Warriors of the Wolfings by the token of the flame
That here in my right hand flickers, come aback to the House of the Name!
For there yet burneth the Hall-Sun beneath the Wolfing roof,
And this flame is litten from it, nor as now shall it fare aloof
Till again it seeth the mighty and the men to be gleaned from the fight.
So wend ye as weird willeth and let your hearts be light;
For through your days of battle all the deeds of our days shall be fair.
To-morrow beginneth the haysel, as if every carle were here;
And who knoweth ere your returning but the hook shall smite the corn?
But the kine shall go down to the meadow as their wont is every morn,
And each eve shall come back to the byre; and the mares and foals afield
Shall ever be heeded duly; and all things shall their increase yield.
And if it shall befall us that hither cometh a foe
Here have we swains of the shepherds good players with the bow,
And old men battle-crafty whose might is nowise spent,
And women fell and fearless well wont to tread the bent
Amid the sheep and the oxen; and their hands are hard with the spear
And their arms are strong and stalwart the battle shield to bear;
And store of weapons have we and the mighty walls of the stead;
And the Roof shall abide you steadfast with the Hall-Sun overhead.
Lo here I quench this candle that is lit from the Hall-Sun's flame
Which unto the Wild-wood clearing with the kin of the Wolfings came
And shall wend with their departure to the limits of the earth;
Nor again shall the torch be lighted till in sorrow or in mirth,
Overthrown or overthrowing, ye come aback once more,
And bid me bear the candle before the Wolf of War."

As she spake the word she turned the candle downward, and thrust it against the grass and quenched it indeed; but the whole throng of warriors turned about, for the bulls of the banner-wain lowered their heads in the yokes and began to draw, lowing mightily; and the wain creaked and moved on, and all the men-at-arms followed after, and down they went through the lanes of the corn, and a many women and children and old men went down into the mead with them.

In their hearts they all wondered what the Hall-Sun's words might signify; for she had told them nought about the battles to be, saving that some should come back to the Mid-mark; whereas aforetime somewhat would she foretell to them concerning the fortune of the fight, and now had she said to them nothing but what their own hearts told them. Nevertheless they bore their crests high as they followed the Wolf down into the meadow, where all was now ready for departure. There they arrayed themselves and went down to the lip of Mirkwood-water; and such was their array that the banner went first, save that a band of fully armed men went before it; and behind it and about were the others as well arrayed as they. Then went the wains that bore their munition, with armed carles of the thrall-folk about them, who

were ever the guard of the wains, and should never leave them night or day; and lastly went the great band of the warriors and the rest of the thralls with them.

As to their war-gear, all the freemen had helms of some kind, but not all of iron or steel; for some bore helms fashioned of horse-hide and bull-hide covered over with the similitude of a Wolf's muzzle; nor were these ill-defence against a sword-stroke. Shields they all had, and all these had the image of the Wolf marked on them, but for many their thralls bore them on the journey. As to their body-armour some carried long byrnie of ring-mail, some coats of leather covered with splinters of horn laid like the shingles of a roof, and some skin-coats only: whereof indeed there were some of which tales went that they were better than the smith's hammer-work, because they had had spells sung over them to keep out steel or iron.

But for their weapons, they bore spears with shafts not very long, some eight feet of our measure; and axes heavy and long-shafted; and bills with great and broad heads; and some few, but not many of the kindred were bowmen, and every freeman was girt with a sword; but of the swords some were long and two-edged, some short and heavy, cutting on one edge, and these were of the kind which they and our forefathers long after called 'sax.' Thus were the freemen arrayed.

But for the thralls, there were many bows among them, especially among those who were of blood alien from the Goths; the others bore short spears, and feathered broad arrows, and clubs bound with iron, and knives and axes, but not every man of them had a sword. Few iron helms they had and no ringed byrnie, but most had a buckler at their backs with no sign or symbol on it.

Thus then set forth the fighting men of the House of the Wolf toward the Thing-stead of the Upper-mark where the hosting was to be, and by then they were moving up along the side of Mirkwood-water it was somewhat past high-noon.

But the stay-at-home people who had come down with them to the meadow lingered long in that place; and much foreboding there was among them of evil to come; and of the old folk, some remembered tales of the past days of the Markmen, and how they had come from the ends of the earth, and the mountains where none dwell now but the Gods of their kindreds; and many of these tales told of their woes and their wars as they went from river to river and from wild-wood to wild-wood before they had established their Houses in the Mark, and fallen to dwelling there season by season and year by year whether the days were good or ill. And it fell into their hearts that now at last mayhappen was their abiding wearing out to an end, and that the day should soon be when they should have to bear the Hall-Sun through the wild-wood, and seek a new dwelling-place afar from the troubling of these newly arisen Welsh foemen.

And so those of them who could not rid themselves of this foreboding were somewhat heavier of heart than their wont was when the House went to the War. For long had they abided there in the Mark, and the life was sweet to them which they knew, and the life which they knew not was bitter to them: and Mirkwood-water was become as a God to them no less than to their fathers of old time; nor lesser was the mead where fed the horses that they loved and the kine that they had reared, and the sheep that they guarded from the Wolf of the Wild-wood: and they worshipped the kind acres which they themselves and their fathers had made fruitful, wedding them to the seasons of seed-time and harvest, that the birth that came from them might become a part of the kindred of the Wolf, and the joy and might of past springs and summers might run in the blood of the Wolfing children. And a dear God indeed to them was the Roof of the Kindred, that their fathers had built and that they yet warded against the fire and the lightening and the wind and the snow, and the passing of the days that devour and the years that heap the dust over the work of men. They thought of how it had stood, and seen so many generations of men come and go; how often it had welcomed the new-born babe, and given farewell to the old man: how many secrets of the past it knew; how many tales which men of the present had forgotten, but which yet mayhap men of times to come should learn of it; for to them yet living it had spoken time and again, and had told them what their fathers had not told them, and it held the memories of the generations and the very life of the Wolfings and their hopes for the days to be.

Thus these poor people thought of the Gods whom they worshipped, and the friends whom they loved, and could not choose but be heavy-hearted when they thought that the wild-wood was awaiting them to swallow all up, and take away from them their Gods and their friends and the mirth of their life, and burden them with hunger and thirst and weariness, that their

children might begin once more to build the House and establish the dwelling, and call new places by old names, and worship new Gods with the ancient worship.

Such imaginations of trouble then were in the hearts of the stay-at-homes of the Wolfings; the tale tells not indeed that all had such forebodings, but chiefly the old folk who were nursing the end of their life-days amidst the cherishing Kindred of the House.

But now they were beginning to turn them back again to the habitations, and a thin stream was flowing through the acres, when they heard a confused sound drawing near blended of horns and the lowing of beasts and the shouting of men; and they looked and saw a throng of brightly clad men coming up stream alongside of Mirkwood-water; and they were not afraid, for they knew that it must be some other company of the Markmen journeying to the hosting of the Folk: and presently they saw that it was the House of the Beamings following their banner on the way to the Thing-stead. But when the new-comers saw the throng out in the meads, some of their young men pricked on their horses and galloped on past the women and old men, to whom they threw a greeting, as they ran past to catch up with the bands of the Wolfings; for between the two houses was there affinity, and much good liking lay between them; and the stay-at-homes, many of them, lingered yet till the main body of the Beamings came with their banner: and their array was much like to that of the Wolfings, but gayer; for whereas it pleased the latter to darken all their war-gear to the colour of the grey Wolf, the Beamings polished all their gear as bright as might be, and their raiment also was mostly bright green of hue and much beflowered; and the sign on their banner was a green leafy tree, and the wain was drawn by great white bulls.

So when their company drew anear to the throng of the stay-at-homes they went to meet and greet each other, and tell tidings to each other; but their banner held steadily onward amidst their converse, and in a little while they followed it, for the way was long to the Thing-stead of the Upper-mark.

So passed away the fighting men by the side of Mirkwood-water, and the throng of the stay-at-homes melted slowly from the meadow and trickled along through the acres to the habitations of the Wolfings, and there they fell to doing whatso of work or play came to their hands.

CHAPTER V—CONCERNING THE HALL-SUN

When the warriors and the others had gone down to the mead, the Hall-Sun was left standing on the Hill of Speech, and she stood there till she saw the host in due array going on its ways dark and bright and beautiful; then she made as if to turn aback to the Great Roof; but all at once it seemed to her as if something held her back, as if her will to move had departed from her, and that she could not put one foot before the other. So she lingered on the Hill, and the quenched candle fell from her hand, and presently she sank adown on the grass and sat there with the face of one thinking intently. Yet was it with her that a thousand thoughts were in her mind at once and no one of them uppermost, and images of what had been and what then was flickered about in her brain, and betwixt them were engendered images of things to be, but unstable and not to be trowed in. So sat the Hall-Sun on the Hill of Speech lost in a dream of the day, whose stories were as little clear as those of a night-dream.

But as she sat musing thus, came to her a woman exceeding old to look on, whom she knew not as one of the kindred or a thrall; and this carline greeted her by the name of Hall-Sun and said:

“Hail, Hall-Sun of the Markmen! how fares it now with thee
When the whelps of the Woodbeast wander with the Leafage of the Tree
All up the Mirkwood-water to seek what they shall find,
The oak-boles of the battle and the war-wood stark and blind?”

Then answered the maiden:

“It fares with me, O mother, that my soul would fain go forth
To behold the ways of the battle, and the praise of the warriors’ worth.
But yet is it held entangled in a maze of many a thing,
As the low-grown bramble holdeth the brake-shoots of the Spring.
I think of the thing that hath been, but no shape is in my thought;
I think of the day that passeth, and its story comes to nought.
I think of the days that shall be, nor shape I any tale.
I will hearken thee, O mother, if hearkening may avail.”

The Carline gazed at her with dark eyes that shone brightly from amidst her brown wrinkled face: then she sat herself down beside her and spake:

"From a far folk have I wandered and I come of an alien blood,
But I know all tales of the Wolfings and their evil and their good;
And when I heard of thy fairness, thereof I heard it said,
That for thee should be never a bridal nor a place in the warrior's bed."

The maiden neither reddened nor paled, but looking with calm steady eyes into the Carline's face she answered:

"Yea true it is, I am wedded to the mighty ones of old,
And the fathers of the Wolfings ere the days of field and fold."

Then a smile came into the eyes of the old woman and she said.

"How glad shall be thy mother of thy worship and thy worth,
And the father that begat thee if yet they dwell on earth!"

But the Hall-Sun answered in the same steady manner as before:

"None knoweth who is my mother, nor my very father's name;
But when to the House of the Wolfings a wild-wood waif I came,
They gave me a foster-mother an ancient dame and good,
And a glorious foster-father the best of all the blood."

Spake the Carline.

"Yea, I have heard the story, but scarce therein might I trow
That thou with all thy beauty wert born 'neath the oaken bough,
And hast crawled a naked baby o'er the rain-drenched autumn-grass;
Wilt thou tell the wandering woman what wise it cometh to pass
That thou art the Mid-mark's Hall-Sun, and the sign of the Wolfings' gain?
Thou shalt pleasure me much by the telling, and there of shalt thou be fain."

Then answered the Hall-Sun.

"Yea; thus much I remember for the first of my memories;
That I lay on the grass in the morning and above were the boughs of the trees.
But nought naked was I as the wood-whelp, but clad in linen white,
And adown the glades of the oakwood the morning sun lay bright.
Then a hind came out of the thicket and stood on the sunlit glade,
And turned her head toward the oak tree and a step on toward me made.
Then stopped, and bounded aback, and away as if in fear,
That I saw her no more; then I wondered, though sitting close anear
Was a she-wolf great and grisly. But with her was I wont to play,
And pull her ears, and belabour her rugged sides and grey,
And hold her jaws together, while she whimpered, slobbering
For the love of my love; and nowise I deemed her a fearsome thing.
There she sat as though she were watching, and o'er head a blue-winged jay
Shrieked out from the topmost oak-twigs, and a squirrel ran his way
Two tree-trunks off. But the she-wolf arose up suddenly
And growled with her neck-fell bristling, as if danger drew anigh;
And therewith I heard a footstep, for nice was my ear to catch
All the noises of the wild-wood; so there did we sit at watch
While the sound of feet grew nigher: then I clapped hand on hand
And crowed for joy and gladness, for there out in the sun did stand
A man, a glorious creature with a gleaming helm on his head,
And gold rings on his arms, in raiment gold-broidered crimson-red.
Straightway he strode up toward us nor heeded the wolf of the wood
But sang as he went in the oak-glade, as a man whose thought is good,
And nought she heeded the warrior, but tame as a sheep was grown,
And trotted away through the wild-wood with her crest all laid adown.
Then came the man and sat down by the oak-bole close unto me
And took me up nought fearful and set me on his knee.
And his face was kind and lovely, so my cheek to his cheek I laid
And touched his cold bright war-helm and with his gold rings played,
And hearkened his words, though I knew not what tale they had to tell,
Yet fain was my heart of their music, and meseemed I loved him well.
So we fared for a while and were fain, till he set down my feet on the grass,
And kissed me and stood up himself, and away through the wood did he pass.
And then came back the she-wolf and with her I played and was fain.
Lo the first thing I remember: wilt thou have me babble again?"

Spake the Carline and her face was soft and kind:

"Nay damsel, long would I hearken to thy voice this summer day.
But how didst thou leave the wild-wood, what people brought thee away?"

Then said the Hall-Sun:

"I awoke on a time in the even, and voices I heard as I woke;
And there was I in the wild-wood by the bole of the ancient oak,
And a ring of men was around me, and glad was I indeed

As I looked upon their faces and the fashion of their weed.
 For I gazed on the red and the scarlet and the beaten silver and gold,
 And blithe were their noble faces and kindly to behold,
 And nought had I seen of such-like since that hour of the other day
 When that warrior came to the oak glade with the little child to play.
 And forth now he came, with the face that my hands had fondled before,
 And a battle shield wrought fairly upon his arm he bore,
 And thereon the wood-wolf's image in ruddy gold was done.
 Then I stretched out my little arms towards the glorious shining one
 And he took me up and set me on his shoulder for a while
 And turned about to his fellows with a blithe and joyous smile;
 And they shouted aloud about me and drew forth gleaming swords
 And clashed them on their bucklers; but nought I knew of the words
 Of their shouting and rejoicing. So thereafter was I laid
 And borne forth on the warrior's warshield, and our way through the wood we made
 'Midst the mirth and great contentment of those fair-clad shielded men.
 "But no tale of the wolf and the wild-wood abides with me since then,
 And the next thing I remember is a huge and dusky hall,
 A world for my little body from ancient wall to wall;
 A world of many doings, and nought for me to do,
 A world of many noises, and known to me were few.
 "Time wore, and I spoke with the Wolfings and knew the speech of the kin,
 And was strange 'neath the roof no longer, as a lonely waif therein;
 And I wrought as a child with my playmates and every hour looked on
 Unto the next hour's joyance till the happy day was done.
 And going and coming amidst us was a woman tall and thin
 With hair like the hoary barley and silver streaks therein.
 And kind and sad of visage, as now I remember me,
 And she sat and told us stories when we were aweary with glee,
 And many of us she fondled, but me the most of all.
 And once from my sleep she waked me and bore me down the hall,
 In the hush of the very midnight, and I was feared thereat.
 But she brought me unto the dais, and there the warrior sat,
 Who took me up and kissed me, as erst within the wood;
 And meseems in his arms I slumbered: but I wakened again and stood
 Alone with the kindly woman, and gone was the goodly man,
 And athwart the hush of the Folk-hall the moon shone bright and wan,
 And the woman dealt with a lamp hung up by a chain aloft,
 And she trimmed it and fed it with oil, while she chanted sweet and soft
 A song whose words I knew not: then she ran it up again,
 And up in the darkness above us died the length of its wavering chain."

"Yea," said the carline, "this woman will have been the Hall-Sun that came before thee. What next dost thou remember?"

Said the maiden:

"Next I mind me of the hazels behind the People's Roof,
 And the children running thither and the magpie flitting aloof,
 And my hand in the hand of the Hall-Sun, as after the others we went,
 And she soberly hearkening my prattle and the words of my intent.
 And now would I call her 'Mother,' and indeed I loved her well.
 "So I waxed; and now of my memories the tale were long to tell;
 But as the days passed over, and I fared to field and wood,
 Alone or with my playmates, still the days were fair and good.
 But the sad and kindly Hall-Sun for my fosterer now I knew,
 And the great and glorious warrior that my heart clung sorely to
 Was but my foster-father; and I knew that I had no kin
 In the ancient House of the Wolfings, though love was warm therein."

Then smiled the carline and said: "Yea, he is thy foster-father, and yet a fond one."

"Sooth is that," said the Hall-Sun. "But wise art thou by seeming. Hast thou come to tell me of what kindred I am, and who is my father and who is my mother?"

Said the carline: "Art thou not also wise? Is it not so that the Hall-Sun of the Wolfings seeth things that are to come?"

"Yea," she said, "yet have I seen waking or sleeping no other father save my foster-father; yet my very mother I have seen, as one who should meet her in the flesh one day."

"And good is that," said the carline; and as she spoke her face waxed kinder, and she said:

"Tell us more of thy days in the House of the Wolfings and how thou farest there."

Said the Hall-Sun:

"I waxed 'neath the Roof of the Wolfings, till now to look upon
 I was of sixteen winters, and the love of the Folk I won,
 And in lovely weed they clad me like the image of a God:
 And lonely now full often the wild-wood ways I trod,
 And I feared no wild-wood creature, and my presence scared them nought;
 And I fell to know of wisdom, and within me stirred my thought,

So that oft anights would I wander through the mead and far away,
And swim the Mirkwood-water, and amidst his eddies play
When earth was dark in the dawn-tide; and over all the folk
I knew of the beasts' desires, as though in words they spoke.

"So I saw of things that should be, were they mighty things or small,
And upon a day as it happened came the war-word to the hall,
And the House must wend to the warfield, and as they sang, and played
With the strings of the harp that even, and the mirth of the war-eve made,
Came the sight of the field to my eyes, and the words waxed hot in me,
And I needs must show the picture of the end of the fight to be.
Then I showed them the Red Wolf bristling o'er the broken fleeing foe;
And the war-gear of the fleers, and their banner did I show,
To wit the Ling-worm's image with the maiden in his mouth;
There I saw my foster-father 'mid the pale blades of the South,
Till aloof swept all the handplay and the hurry of the chase,
And he lay along by an ash-tree, no helm about his face,
No byrny on his body; and an arrow in his thigh,
And a broken spear in his shoulder. Then I saw myself draw nigh
To sing the song blood-staying. Then saw I how we twain
Went 'midst of the host triumphant in the Wolfings' banner-wain,
The black bulls lowing before us athwart the warriors' song,
As up from Mirkwood-water we went our ways along
To the Great Roof of the Wolfings, whence streamed the women out
And the sound of their rejoicing blent with the warriors' shout.

"They heard me and saw the picture, and they wotted how wise I was grown,
And they loved me, and glad were their hearts at the tale my lips had shown;
And my body clad as an image of a God to the field they bore,
And I held by the mast of the banner as I looked upon their war,
And endured to see unblenching on the wind-swept sunny plain
All the picture of my vision by the men-folk done again.
And over my Foster-father I sang the staunching-song,
Till the life-blood that was ebbing flowed back to his heart the strong,
And we wended back in the war-wain 'midst the gleanings of the fight
Unto the ancient dwelling and the Hall-Sun's glimmering light.

"So from that day henceforward folk hung upon my words,
For the battle of the autumn, and the harvest of the swords;
And e'en more was I loved than aforesaid. So wore a year away,
And heavy was the burden of the lore that on me lay.

"But my fosterer the Hall-Sun took sick at the birth of the year,
And changed her life as the year changed, as summer drew anear.
But she knew that her life was waning, and lying in her bed
She taught me the lore of the Hall-Sun, and every word to be said
At the trimming in the midnight and the feeding in the morn,
And she laid her hands upon me ere unto the howe she was borne
With the kindred gathered about us; and they wotted her weird and her will,
And hailed me for the Hall-Sun when at last she lay there still.
And they did on me the garment, the holy cloth of old,
And the neck-chain wrought for the goddess, and the rings of the hallowed gold.
So here am I abiding, and of things to be I tell,
Yet know not what shall befall me nor why with the Wolfings I dwell."

Then said the carline:

"What seest thou, O daughter, of the journey of to-day?
And why wendest thou not with the war-host on the battle-echoing way?"

Said the Hall-Sun.

"O mother, here dwelleth the Hall-Sun while the kin hath a dwelling-place,
Nor ever again shall I look on the onset or the chase,
Till the day when the Roof of the Wolfings looketh down on the girdle of foes,
And the arrow singeth over the grass of the kindred's close;
Till the pillars shake with the shouting and quivers the roof-tree dear,
When the Hall of the Wolfings garners the harvest of the spear."

Therewith she stood on her feet and turned her face to the Great Roof, and gazed long at it,
not heeding the crone by her side; and she muttered words of whose signification the other
knew not, though she listened intently, and gazed ever at her as closely as might be.

Then fell the Hall-Sun utterly silent, and the lids closed over her eyes, and her hands were
clenched, and her feet pressed hard on the daisies: her bosom heaved with sore sighs, and
great tear-drops oozed from under her eyelids and fell on to her raiment and her feet and on
to the flowery summer grass; and at the last her mouth opened and she spake, but in a voice
that was marvellously changed from that she spake in before:

"Why went ye forth, O Wolfings, from the garth your fathers built,
And the House where sorrow dieth, and all unloosed is guilt?
Turn back, turn back, and behold it! lest your feet be over slow
When your shields are heavy-burdened with the arrows of the foe;

How ye totter, how ye stumble on the rough and corpse-strewn way!
 And lo, how the eve is eating the afternoon of day!
 O why are ye abiding till the sun is sunk in night
 And the forest trees are ruddy with the battle-kindled light?
 O rest not yet, ye Wolfings, lest void be your resting-place,
 And into lands that ye know not the Wolf must turn his face,
 And ye wander and ye wander till the land in the ocean cease,
 And your battle bring no safety and your labour no increase."

Then was she silent for a while, and her tears ceased to flow; but presently her eyes opened once more, and she lifted up her voice and cried aloud—

"I see, I see! O Godfolk behold it from aloof,
 How the little flames steal flickering along the ridge of the Roof!
 They are small and red 'gainst the heavens in the summer afternoon;
 But when the day is dusking, white, high shall they wave to the moon.
 Lo, the fire plays now on the windows like strips of scarlet cloth
 Wind-waved! but look in the night-tide on the onset of its wrath,
 How it wraps round the ancient timbers and hides the mighty roof
 But lighteth little crannies, so lost and far aloof,
 That no man yet of the kindred hath seen them ere to-night,
 Since first the builder builded in loving and delight!"

Then again she stayed her speech with weeping and sobbing, but after a while was still again, and then she spoke pointing toward the roof with her right hand.

"I see the fire-raisers and iron-helmed they are,
 Brown-faced about the banners that their hands have borne afar.
 And who in the garth of the kindred shall bear adown their shield
 Since the onrush of the Wolfings they caught in the open field,
 As the might of the mountain lion falls dead in the hempen net?
 O Wolfings, long have ye tarried, but the hour abideth yet.
 What life for the life of the people shall be given once for all,
 What sorrow shall stay sorrow in the half-burnt Wolfing Hall?
 There is nought shall quench the fire save the tears of the Godfolk's kin,
 And the heart of the life-delighter, and the life-blood cast therein."

Then once again she fell silent, and her eyes closed again, and the slow tears gushed out from them, and she sank down sobbing on the grass, and little by little the storm of grief sank and her head fell back, and she was as one quietly asleep. Then the carline hung over her and kissed her and embraced her; and then through her closed eyes and her slumber did the Hall-Sun see a marvel; for she who was kissing her was young in semblance and unwrinkled, and lovely to look on, with plenteous long hair of the hue of ripe barley, and clad in glistening raiment such as has been woven in no loom on earth.

And indeed it was the Wood-Sun in the semblance of a crone, who had come to gather wisdom of the coming time from the foreseeing of the Hall-Sun; since now at last she herself foresaw nothing of it, though she was of the kindred of the Gods and the Fathers of the Goths. So when she had heard the Hall-Sun she deemed that she knew but too well what her words meant, and what for love, what for sorrow, she grew sick at heart as she heard them.

So at last she arose and turned to look at the Great Roof; and strong and straight, and cool and dark grey showed its ridge against the pale sky of the summer afternoon all quivering with the heat of many hours' sun: dark showed its windows as she gazed on it, and stark and stiff she knew were its pillars within.

Then she said aloud, but to herself: "What then if a merry and mighty life be given for it, and the sorrow of the people be redeemed; yet will not I give the life which is his; nay rather let him give the bliss which is mine. But oh! how may it be that he shall die joyous and I shall live unhappy!"

Then she went slowly down from the Hill of Speech, and whoso saw her deemed her but a gangrel carline. So she went her ways and let the wood cover her.

But in a little while the Hall-Sun awoke alone, and sat up with a sigh, and she remembered nothing concerning her sight of the flickering flame along the hall-roof, and the fire-tongues like strips of scarlet cloth blown by the wind, nor had she any memory of her words concerning the coming day. But the rest of her talk with the carline she remembered, and also the vision of the beautiful woman who had kissed and embraced her; and she knew that it was her very mother. Also she perceived that she had been weeping, therefore she knew that she had uttered words of wisdom. For so it fared with her at whiles, that she knew not her own words of foretelling, but spoke them out as if in a dream.

So now she went down from the Hill of Speech soberly, and turned toward the Woman's door of the hall, and on her way she met the women and old men and youths coming back

from the meadow with little mirth: and there were many of them who looked shyly at her as though they would gladly have asked her somewhat, and yet durst not. But for her, her sadness passed away when she came among them, and she looked kindly on this and that one of them, and entered with them into the Woman's Chamber, and did what came to her hand to do.

CHAPTER VI—THEY TALK ON THE WAY TO THE FOLK-THING

All day long one standing on the Speech-hill of the Wolfings might have seen men in their war-array streaming along the side of Mirkwood-water, on both sides thereof; and the last comers from the Nether-mark came hastening all they might; for they would not be late at the trysting-place. But these were of a kindred called the Laxings, who bore a salmon on their banner; and they were somewhat few in number, for they had but of late years become a House of the Markmen. Their banner-wain was drawn by white horses, fleet and strong, and they were no great band, for they had but few thralls with them, and all, free men and thralls, were a-horseback; so they rode by hastily with their banner-wain, their few munition-wains following as they might.

Now tells the tale of the men-at-arms of the Wolfings and the Beamings, that soon they fell in with the Elking host, which was journeying but leisurely, so that the Wolfings might catch up with them: they were a very great kindred, the most numerous of all Mid-mark, and at this time they had affinity with the Wolfings. But old men of the House remembered how they had heard their grandsires and very old men tell that there had been a time when the Elking House had been established by men from out of the Wolfing kindred, and how they had wandered away from the Mark in the days when it had been first settled, and had abided aloof for many generations of men; and so at last had come back again to the Mark, and had taken up their habitation at a place in Mid-mark where was dwelling but a remnant of a House called the Thyrrings, who had once been exceeding mighty, but had by that time almost utterly perished in a great sickness which befel in those days. So then these two Houses, the wanderers come back and the remnant left by the sickness of the Gods, made one House together, and increased and thrived after their coming together, and wedded with the Wolfings, and became a very great House.

Gallant and glorious was their array now, as they marched along with their banner of the Elk, which was drawn by the very beasts themselves tamed to draught to that end through many generations; they were fatter and sleeker than their wild-wood brethren, but not so mighty.

So were the men of the three kindreds somewhat mingled together on the way. The Wolfings were the tallest and the biggest made; but of those dark-haired men aforesaid, were there fewest amongst the Beamings, and most among the Elkings, as though they had drawn to them more men of alien blood during their wanderings aforesaid. So they talked together and made each other good cheer, as is the wont of companions in arms on the eve of battle; and the talk ran, as may be deemed, on that journey and what was likely to come of it: and spake an Elking warrior to a Wolfing by whom he rode:

“O Wolfkettle, hath the Hall-Sun had any foresight of the day of battle?”

“Nay,” said the other, “when she lighted the farewell candle, she bade us come back again, and spoke of the day of our return; but that methinks, as thou and I would talk of it, thinking what would be likely to befall. Since we are a great host of valiant men, and these Welshmen most valiant, and as the rumour runneth bigger-bodied men than the Hun-folk, and so well ordered as never folk have been. So then if we overthrow them we shall come back again; and if they overthrow us, the remnant of us shall fall back before them till we come to our habitations; for it is not to be looked for that they will fall in upon our rear and prevent us, since we have the thickest of the wild-wood on our flanks.”

“Sooth is that,” said the Elking; “and as to the mightiness of this folk and their customs, ye may gather somewhat from the songs which our House yet singeth, and which ye have heard wide about in the Mark; for this is the same folk of which a many of them tell, making up that story-lay which is called the South-Welsh Lay; which telleth how we have met this folk in times past when we were in fellowship with a folk of the Welsh of like customs to ourselves: for we of the Elkings were then but a feeble folk. So we marched with this folk of the Kymry and met the men of the cities, and whiles we overthrew and whiles were overthrown, but at last in a great battle were overthrown with so great a slaughter, that the red blood rose

over the wheels of the wains, and the city-folk fainted with the work of the slaughter, as men who mow a match in the meadows when the swathes are dry and heavy and the afternoon of midsummer is hot; and there they stood and stared on the field of the slain, and knew not whether they were in Home or Hell, so fierce the fight had been.”

Therewith a man of the Beamings, who was riding on the other side of the Elking, reached out over his horse’s neck and said:

“Yea friend, but is there not some telling of a tale concerning how ye and your fellowship took the great city of the Welshmen of the South, and dwelt there long.”

“Yea,” said the Elking, “Hearken how it is told in the South-Welsh Lay:

“‘Have ye not heard
Of the ways of Weird?
How the folk fared forth
Far away from the North?
And as light as one wendeth
Whereas the wood endeth,
When of nought is our need,
And none telleth our deed,
So Rodgeir unwearied and Reidfari wan
The town where none tarried the shield-shaking man.
All lonely the street there, and void was the way
And nought hindered our feet but the dead men that lay
Under shield in the lanes of the houses heavens-high,
All the ring-bearing swains that abode there to die.’

“Tells the Lay, that none abode the Goths and their fellowship, but such as were mighty enough to fall before them, and the rest, both man and woman, fled away before our folk and before the folk of the Kymry, and left their town for us to dwell in; as saith the Lay:

“‘Glistening of gold
Did men’s eyen behold;
Shook the pale sword
O’er the unspoken word,
No man drew nigh us
With weapon to try us,
For the Welsh-wrought shield
Lay low on the field.
By man’s hand unbuilt all seemed there to be,
The walls ruddy gilded, the pearls of the sea:
Yea all things were dead there save pillar and wall,
But *they* lived and *they* said us the song of the hall;
The dear hall left to perish by men of the land,
For the Goth-folk to cherish with gold gaining hand.’

“See ye how the Lay tells that the hall was bolder than the men, who fled from it, and left all for our fellowship to deal with in the days gone by?”

Said the Wolfing man:

“And as it was once, so shall it be again. Maybe we shall go far on this journey, and see at least one of the garths of the Southlands, even those which they call cities. For I have heard it said that they have more cities than one only, and that so great are their kindreds, that each liveth in a garth full of mighty houses, with a wall of stone and lime around it; and that in every one of these garths lieth wealth untold heaped up. And wherefore should not all this fall to the Markmen and their valiancy?”

Said the Elking:

“As to their many cities and the wealth of them, that is sooth; but as to each city being the habitation of each kindred, it is otherwise: for rather it may be said of them that they have forgotten kindred, and have none, nor do they heed whom they wed, and great is the confusion amongst them. And mighty men among them ordain where they shall dwell, and what shall be their meat, and how long they shall labour after they are weary, and in all wise what manner of life shall be amongst them; and though they be called free men who suffer this, yet may no house or kindred gainsay this rule and order. In sooth they are a people mighty, but unhappy.”

Said Wolfkettle:

“And hast thou learned all this from the ancient story lays, O Hiarandi? For some of them I know, though not all, and therein have I noted nothing of all this. Is there some new minstrel arisen in thine House of a memory excelling all those that have gone before? If that be so, I bid him to the Roof of the Wolfings as soon as may be; for we lack new tales.”

“Nay,” said Hiarandi, “This that I tell thee is not a tale of past days, but a tale of to-day. For there came to us a man from out of the wild-wood, and prayed us peace, and we gave it him; and he told us that he was of a House of the Gael, and that his House had been in a great battle against these Welshmen, whom he calleth the Romans; and that he was taken in the battle, and sold as a thrall in one of their garths; and howbeit, it was not their master-garth, yet there he learned of their customs: and sore was the lesson! Hard was his life amongst them, for their thralls be not so well entreated as their draught-beasts, so many do they take in battle; for they are a mighty folk; and these thralls and those aforesaid unhappy freemen do all tilling and herding and all deeds of craftsmanship: and above these are men whom they call masters and lords who do nought, nay not so much as smithy their own edge-weapons, but linger out their days in their dwellings and out of their dwellings, lying about in the sun or the hall-cinders, like cur-dogs who have fallen away from kind.

“So this man made a shift to flee away from out of that garth, since it was not far from the great river; and being a valiant man, and young and mighty of body, he escaped all perils and came to us through the Mirkwood. But we saw that he was no liar, and had been very evilly handled, for upon his body was the mark of many a stripe, and of the shackles that had been soldered on to his limbs; also it was more than one of these accursed people whom he had slain when he fled. So he became our guest and we loved him, and he dwelt among us and yet dwelleth, for we have taken him into our House. But yesterday he was sick and might not ride with us; but may be he will follow on and catch up with us in a day or two. And if he come not, then will I bring him over to the Wolfings when the battle is done.”

Then laughed the Beaming man, and spake:

“How then if ye come not back, nor Wolfkettle, nor the Welsh Guest, nor I myself? Meseemeth no one of these Southland Cities shall we behold, and no more of the Southlanders than their war-array.”

“These are evil words,” said Wolfkettle, “though such an outcome must be thought on. But why deemest thou this?”

Said the Beaming: “There is no Hall-Sun sitting under our Roof at home to tell true tales concerning the Kindred every day. Yet forsooth from time to time is a word said in our Folk-hall for good or for evil; and who can choose but hearken thereto? And yestereve was a woeful word spoken, and that by a man-child of ten winters.”

Said the Elking: “Now that thou hast told us thus much, thou must tell us more, yea, all the word which was spoken; else belike we shall deem of it as worse than it was.”

Said the Beaming: “Thus it was; this little lad brake out weeping yestereve, when the Hall was full and feasting; and he wailed, and roared out, as children do, and would not be pacified, and when he was asked why he made that to do, he said: ‘Well away! Raven hath promised to make me a clay horse and to bake it in the kiln with the pots next week; and now he goeth to the war, and he shall never come back, and never shall my horse be made.’ Thereat we all laughed as ye may well deem. But the lad made a sour countenance on us and said, ‘why do ye laugh? look yonder, what see ye?’ ‘Nay,’ said one, ‘nought but the Feast-hall wall and the hangings of the High-tide thereon.’ Then said the lad sobbing: ‘Ye see ill: further afield see I: I see a little plain, on a hill top, and fells beyond it far bigger than our speech-hill: and there on the plain lieth Raven as white as parchment; and none hath such hue save the dead.’ Then said Raven, (and he was a young man, and was standing thereby). ‘And well is that, swain, to die in harness! Yet hold up thine heart; here is Gunbert who shall come back and bake thine horse for thee.’ ‘Nay never more,’ quoth the child, ‘For I see his pale head lying at Raven’s feet; but his body with the green gold-broidered kirtle I see not.’ Then was the laughter stilled, and man after man drew near to the child, and questioned him, and asked, ‘dost thou see me?’ ‘dost thou see me?’ And he failed to see but few of those that asked him. Therefore now meseemeth that not many of us shall see the cities of the South, and those few belike shall look on their own shackles therewithal.”

“Nay,” said Hiarandi, “What is all this? heard ye ever of a company of fighting men that fared afield, and found the foe, and came back home leaving none behind them?”

Said the Beaming: “Yet seldom have I heard a child foretell the death of warriors. I tell thee that hadst thou been there, thou wouldst have thought of it as if the world were coming to an end.”

“Well,” said Wolfkettle, “let it be as it may! Yet at least I will not be led away from the field by the foemen. Oft may a man be hindered of victory, but never of death if he willeth it.”

Therewith he handled a knife that hung about his neck, and went on to say: "But indeed, I do much marvel that no word came into the mouth of the Hall-Sun yestereven or this morning, but such as any woman of the kindred might say."

Therewith fell their talk awhile, and as they rode they came to where the wood drew nigher to the river, and thus the Mid-mark had an end; for there was no House had a dwelling in the Mid-mark higher up the water than the Elkings, save one only, not right great, who mostly fared to war along with the Elkings: and this was the Oselings, whose banner bore the image of the Wood-ousel, the black bird with the yellow neb; and they had just fallen into the company of the greater House.

So now Mid-mark was over and past, and the serried trees of the wood came down like a wall but a little way from the lip of the water; and scattered trees, mostly quicken-trees grew here and there on the very water side. But Mirkwood-water ran deep swift and narrow between high clean-cloven banks, so that none could dream of fording, and not so many of swimming its dark green dangerous waters. And the day wore on towards evening and the glory of the western sky was unseen because of the wall of high trees. And still the host made on, and because of the narrowness of the space between river and wood it was strung out longer and looked a very great company of men. And moreover the men of the eastern-lying part of Mid-mark, were now marching thick and close on the other side of the river but a little way from the Wolfings and their fellows; for nothing but the narrow river sundered them.

So night fell, and the stars shone, and the moon rose, and yet the Wolfings and their fellows stayed not, since they wotted that behind them followed a many of the men of the Mark, both the Mid and the Nether, and they would by no means hinder their march.

So wended the Markmen between wood and stream on either side of Mirkwood-water, till now at last the night grew deep and the moon set, and it was hard on midnight, and they had kindled many torches to light them on either side of the water. So whereas they had come to a place where the trees gave back somewhat from the river, which was well-grassed for their horses and neat, and was called Baitmead, the companies on the western side made stay there till morning. And they drew the wains right up to the thick of the wood, and all men turned aside into the mead from the beaten road, so that those who were following after might hold on their way if so they would. There then they appointed watchers of the night, while the rest of them lay upon the sward by the side of the trees, and slept through the short summer night.

The tale tells not that any man dreamed of the fight to come in such wise that there was much to tell of his dream on the morrow; many dreamed of no fight or faring to war, but of matters little, and often laughable, mere mingled memories of bygone time that had no waking wits to marshal them.

But that man of the Beamings dreamed that he was at home watching a potter, a man of the thralls of the House working at his wheel, and fashioning bowls and ewers: and he had a mind to take of his clay and fashion a horse for the lad that had bemoaned the promise of his toy. And he tried long and failed to fashion anything; for the clay fell to pieces in his hands; till at last it held together and grew suddenly, not into an image of a horse, but of the Great Yule Boar, the similitude of the Holy Beast of Frey. So he laughed in his sleep and was glad, and leaped up and drew his sword with his clay-stained hands that he might wave it over the Earth Boar, and swear a great oath of a doughty deed. And therewith he found himself standing on his feet indeed, just awakened in the cold dawn, and holding by his right hand to an ash-sapling that grew beside him. So he laughed again, and laid him down, and leaned back and slept his sleep out till the sun and the voices of his fellows stirring awakened him.

CHAPTER VII—THEY GATHER TO THE FOLK-MOTE

When it was the morning, all the host of the Markmen was astir on either side of the water, and when they had broken their fast, they got speedily into array, and were presently on the road again; and the host was now strung out longer yet, for the space between water and wood once more diminished till at last it was no wider than ten men might go abreast, and looking ahead it was as if the wild-wood swallowed up both river and road.

But the fighting-men hastened on merrily with their hearts raised high, since they knew that they would soon be falling in with more of their people, and the coming fight was growing a clearer picture to their eyes; so from side to side of the river they shouted out the cries of

their Houses, or friend called to friend across the eddies of Mirkwood-water, and there was game and glee enough.

So they fared till the wood gave way before them, and lo, the beginning of another plain, somewhat like the Mid-mark. There also the water widened out before them, and there were eyots in it with stony shores crowned with willow or with alder, and aspens rising from the midst of them.

But as for the plain, it was thus much different from Mid-mark, that the wood which begirt it rose on the south into low hills, and away beyond them were other hills blue in the distance, for the most bare of wood, and not right high, the pastures of the wild-bull and the bison, whereas now dwelt a folk somewhat scattered and feeble; hunters and herdsmen, with little tillage about their abodes, a folk akin to the Markmen and allied to them. They had come into those parts later than the Markmen, as the old tales told; which said moreover that in days gone by a folk dwelt among those hills who were alien from the Goths, and great foes to the Markmen; and how that on a time they came down from their hills with a great host, together with new-comers of their own blood, and made their way through the wild-wood, and fell upon the Upper-mark; and how that there befel a fearful battle that endured for three days; and the first day the Aliens worsted the Markmen, who were but a few, since they were they of the Upper-mark only. So the Aliens burned their houses and slew their old men, and drave off many of their women and children; and the remnant of the men of the Upper-mark with all that they had, which was now but little, took refuge in an island of Mirkwood-water, where they fenced themselves as well as they could for that night; for they expected the succour of their kindred of the Mid-mark and the Nether-mark, unto whom they had sped the war-arrow when they first had tidings of the onset of the Aliens.

So at the sun-rising they sacrificed to the Gods twenty chieftains of the Aliens whom they had taken, and therewithal a maiden of their own kindred, the daughter of their war-duke, that she might lead that mighty company to the House of the Gods; and thereto was she nothing loth, but went right willingly.

There then they awaited the onset. But the men of Mid-mark came up in the morning, when the battle was but just joined, and fell on so fiercely that the aliens gave back, and then they of the Upper-mark stormed out of their eyot, and fell on over the ford, and fought till the water ran red with their blood, and the blood of the foemen. So the Aliens gave back before the onset of the Markmen all over the meads; but when they came to the hillocks and the tofts of the half-burned habitations, and the wood was on their flank, they made a stand again, and once more the battle waxed hot, for they were very many, and had many bowmen: there fell the War-duke of the Markmen, whose daughter had been offered up for victory, and his name was Agni, so that the tofts where he fell have since been called Agni's Tofts. So that day they fought all over the plain, and a great many died, both of the Aliens and the Markmen, and though these last were victorious, yet when the sun went down there still were the Aliens abiding in the Upper-mark, fenced by their wain-burg, beaten, and much diminished in number, but still a host of men: while of the Markmen many had fallen, and many more were hurt, because the Aliens were good bowmen.

But on the morrow again, as the old tale told, came up the men of the Nether-mark fresh and unwounded; and so the battle began again on the southern limit of the Upper-mark where the Aliens had made their wain-burg. But not long did it endure; for the Markmen fell on so fiercely, that they stormed over the wain-burg, and slew all before them, and there was a very great slaughter of the Aliens; so great, tells the old tale, that never again durst they meet the Markmen in war.

Thus went forth the host of the Markmen, faring along both sides of the water into the Upper-mark; and on the west side, where went the Wolfings, the ground now rose by a long slope into a low hill, and when they came unto the brow thereof, they beheld before them the whole plain of the Upper-mark, and the dwellings of the kindred therein all girdled about by the wild-wood; and beyond, the blue hills of the herdsmen, and beyond them still, a long way aloof, lying like a white cloud on the verge of the heavens, the snowy tops of the great mountains. And as they looked down on to the plain they saw it embroidered, as it were, round about the habitations which lay within ken by crowds of many people, and the banners of the kindreds and the arms of men; and many a place they saw named after the ancient battle and that great slaughter of the Aliens.

On their left hand lay the river, and as it now fairly entered with them into the Upper-mark,

it spread out into wide rippling shallows beset with yet more sandy eyots, amongst which was one much greater, rising amidmost into a low hill, grassy and bare of tree or bush; and this was the island whereon the Markmen stood on the first day of the Great Battle, and it was now called the Island of the Gods.

Thereby was the ford, which was firm and good and changed little from year to year, so that all Markmen knew it well and it was called Battleford: thereover now crossed all the eastern companies, footmen and horsemen, freemen and thralls, wains and banners, with shouting and laughter, and the noise of horns and the lowing of neat, till all that plain's end was flooded with the host of the Markmen.

But when the eastern-abiders had crossed, they made no stay, but went duly ordered about their banners, winding on toward the first of the abodes on the western side of the water; because it was but a little way southwest of this that the Thing-stead of the Upper-mark lay; and the whole Folk was summoned thither when war threatened from the South, just as it was called to the Thing-stead of the Nether-mark, when the threat of war came from the North. But the western companies stayed on the brow of that low hill till all the eastern men were over the river, and on their way to the Thing-stead, and then they moved on.

So came the Wolfings and their fellows up to the dwellings of the northernmost kindred, who were called the Daylings, and bore on their banner the image of the rising sun. Thereabout was the Mark somewhat more hilly and broken than in the Mid-mark, so that the Great Roof of the Daylings, which was a very big house, stood on a hillock whose sides had been cleft down sheer on all sides save one (which was left as a bridge) by the labour of men, and it was a very defensible place.

Thereon were now gathered round about the Roof all the stay-at-homes of the kindred, who greeted with joyous cries the men-at-arms as they passed. Albeit one very old man, who sat in a chair near to the edge of the sheer hill looking on the war array, when he saw the Wolfing banner draw near, stood up to gaze on it, and then shook his head sadly, and sank back again into his chair, and covered his face with his hands: and when the folk saw that, a silence bred of the coldness of fear fell on them, for that elder was deemed a foreseeing man.

But as those three fellows, of whose talk of yesterday the tale has told, drew near and beheld what the old carle did (for they were riding together this day also) the Beaming man laid his hand on Wolfkettle's rein and said:

"Lo you, neighbour, if thy Vala hath seen nought, yet hath this old man seen somewhat, and that somewhat even as the little lad saw it. Many a mother's son shall fall before the Welshmen."

But Wolfkettle shook his rein free, and his face reddened as of one who is angry, yet he kept silence, while the Elking said:

"Let be, Toti! for he that lives shall tell the tale to the foreseers, and shall make them wiser than they are to-day."

Then laughed Toti, as one who would not be thought to be too heedful of the morrow. But Wolfkettle brake out into speech and rhyme, and said:

"O warriors, the Wolfing kindred shall live or it shall die;
And alive it shall be as the oak-tree when the summer storm goes by;
But dead it shall be as its bole, that they hew for the corner-post
Of some fair and mighty folk-hall, and the roof of a war-fain host."

So therewith they rode their ways past the abode of the Daylings.

Straight to the wood went all the host, and so into it by a wide way cleft through the thicket, and in some thirty minutes they came thereby into a great wood-lawn cleared amidst of it by the work of men's hands. There already was much of the host gathered, sitting or standing in a great ring round about a space bare of men, where amidmost rose a great mound raised by men's hands and wrought into steps to be the sitting-places of the chosen elders and chief men of the kindred; and atop the mound was flat and smooth save for a turf bench or seat that went athwart it whereon ten men might sit.

All the wains save the banner-wains had been left behind at the Dayling abode, nor was any beast there save the holy beasts who drew the banner-wains and twenty white horses, that stood wreathed about with flowers within the ring of warriors, and these were for the burnt offering to be given to the Gods for a happy day of battle. Even the war-horses of the host they must leave in the wood without the wood-lawn, and all men were afoot who were there.

For this was the Thing-stead of the Upper-mark, and the holiest place of the Markmen, and no beast, either neat, sheep, or horse might pasture there, but was straightway slain and burned if he wandered there; nor might any man eat therein save at the holy feasts when offerings were made to the Gods.

So the Wolfings took their place there in the ring of men with the Elkings on their right hand and the Beamings on their left. And in the midst of the Wolfing array stood Thiodolf clad in the dwarf-wrought hauberk: but his head was bare; for he had sworn over the Cup of Renown that he would fight unhelmed throughout all that trouble, and would bear no shield in any battle thereof however fierce the onset might be.

Short, and curling close to his head was his black hair, a little grizzled, so that it looked like rings of hard dark iron: his forehead was high and smooth, his lips full and red, his eyes steady and wide-open, and all his face joyous with the thought of the fame of his deeds, and the coming battle with a foeman whom the Markmen knew not yet.

He was tall and wide-shouldered, but so exceeding well fashioned of all his limbs and body that he looked no huge man. He was a man well beloved of women, and children would mostly run to him gladly and play with him. A most fell warrior was he, whose deeds no man of the Mark could equal, but blithe of speech even when he was sorrowful of mood, a man that knew not bitterness of heart: and for all his exceeding might and valiancy, he was proud and high to no man; so that the very thralls loved him.

He was not abounding in words in the field; nor did he use much the custom of those days in reviling and defying with words the foe that was to be smitten with swords.

There were those who had seen him in the field for the first time who deemed him slack at the work: for he would not always press on with the foremost, but would hold him a little aback, and while the battle was young he forbore to smite, and would do nothing but help a kinsman who was hard pressed, or succour the wounded. So that if men were dealing with no very hard matter, and their hearts were high and overweening, he would come home at whiles with unbloodied blade. But no man blamed him save those who knew him not: for his intent was that the younger men should win themselves fame, and so raise their courage, and become high-hearted and stout.

But when the stour was hard, and the battle was broken, and the hearts of men began to fail them, and doubt fell upon the Markmen, then was he another man to see: wise, but swift and dangerous, rushing on as if shot out by some mighty engine: heedful of all, on either side and in front; running hither and thither as the fight failed and the fire of battle faltered; his sword so swift and deadly that it was as if he wielded the very lightening of the heavens: for with the sword it was ever his wont to fight.

But it must be said that when the foemen turned their backs, and the chase began, then Thiodolf would nowise withhold his might as in the early battle, but ever led the chase, and smote on the right hand and on the left, sparing none, and crying out to the men of the kindred not to weary in their work, but to fulfil all the hours of their day.

For thuswise would he say and this was a word of his:

"Let us rest to-morrow, fellows, since to-day we have fought amain!
Let not these men we have smitten come aback on our hands again,
And say 'Ye Wolfing warriors, ye have done your work but ill,
Fall to now and do it again, like the craftsman who learneth his skill!'"

Such then was Thiodolf, and ever was he the chosen leader of the Wolfings and often the War-duke of the whole Folk.

By his side stood the other chosen leader, whose name was Heriulf; a man well stricken in years, but very mighty and valiant; wise in war and well renowned; of few words save in battle, and therein a singer of songs, a laughier, a joyous man, a merry companion. He was a much bigger man than Thiodolf; and indeed so huge was his stature, that he seemed to be of the kindred of the Mountain Giants; and his bodily might went with his stature, so that no one man might deal with him body to body. His face was big; his cheek-bones high; his nose like an eagle's neb, his mouth wide, his chin square and big; his eyes light-grey and fierce under shaggy eyebrows: his hair white and long.

Such were his raiment and weapons, that he wore a coat of fence of dark iron scales sewn on to horse-hide, and a dark iron helm fashioned above his brow into the similitude of the Wolf's head with gaping jaws; and this he had wrought for himself with his own hands, for he was a good smith. A round buckler he bore and a huge twibill, which no man of the kindred could

well wield save himself; and it was done both blade and shaft with knots and runes in gold; and he loved that twibill well, and called it the Wolf's Sister.

There then stood Heriulf, looking no less than one of the forefathers of the kindred come back again to the battle of the Wolfings.

He was well-beloved for his wondrous might, and he was no hard man, though so fell a warrior, and though of few words, as aforesaid, was a blithe companion to old and young. In numberless battles had he fought, and men deemed it a wonder that Odin had not taken to him a man so much after his own heart; and they said it was neighbourly done of the Father of the Slain to forbear his company so long, and showed how well he loved the Wolfing House.

For a good while yet came other bands of Markmen into the Thing-stead; but at last there was an end of their coming. Then the ring of men opened, and ten warriors of the Daylings made their way through it, and one of them, the oldest, bore in his hand the War-horn of the Daylings; for this kindred had charge of the Thing-stead, and of all appertaining to it. So while his nine fellows stood round about the Speech-Hill, the old warrior clomb up to the topmost of it, and blew a blast on the horn. Thereon they who were sitting rose up, and they who were talking each to each held their peace, and the whole ring drew nigher to the hill, so that there was a clear space behind them 'twixt them and the wood, and a space before them between them and the hill, wherein were those nine warriors, and the horses for the burnt-offering, and the altar of the Gods; and now were all well within ear-shot of a man speaking amidst the silence in a clear voice.

But there were gathered of the Markmen to that place some four thousand men, all chosen warriors and doughty men; and of the thralls and aliens dwelling with them they were leading two thousand. But not all of the freemen of the Upper-mark could be at the Thing; for needs must there be some guard to the passes of the wood toward the south and the hills of the herdsmen, whereas it was no wise impassable to a wisely led host: so five hundred men, what of freemen, what of thralls, abode there to guard the wild-wood; and these looked to have some helping from the hill-men.

Now came an ancient warrior into the space between the men and the wild-wood holding in his hand a kindled torch; and first he faced due south by the sun, then, turning, he slowly paced the whole circle going from east to west, and so on till he had reached the place he started from: then he dashed the torch to the ground and quenched the fire, and so went his ways to his own company again.

Then the old Dayling warrior on the mound-top drew his sword, and waved it flashing in the sun toward the four quarters of the heavens; and thereafter blew again a blast on the War-horn. Then fell utter silence on the whole assembly, and the wood was still around them, save here and there the stamping of a war-horse or the sound of his tugging at the woodland grass; for there was little resort of birds to the depths of the thicket, and the summer morning was windless.

CHAPTER VIII—THE FOLK-MOTE OF THE MARKMEN

So the Dayling warrior lifted up his voice and said:

"O kindreds of the Markmen, hearken the words I say;
For no chancehap assembly is gathered here to-day.
The fire hath gone around us in the hands of our very kin,
And twice the horn hath sounded, and the Thing is hallowed in.
Will ye hear or forbear to hearken the tale there is to tell?
There are many mouths to tell it, and a many know it well.
And the tale is this, that the foemen against our kindreds fare
Who eat the meadows desert, and burn the desert bare."

Then sat he down on the turf seat; but there arose a murmur in the assembly as of men eager to hearken; and without more ado came a man out of a company of the Upper-mark, and clomb up to the top of the Speech-Hill, and spoke in a loud voice:

"I am Bork, a man of the Geirings of the Upper-mark: two days ago I and five others were in the wild-wood a-hunting, and we wended through the thicket, and came into the land of the hill-folk; and after we had gone a while we came to a long dale with a brook running through it, and yew-trees scattered about it and a hazel copse at one end; and by the copse was a band of men who had women and children with them, and a few neat, and fewer horses; but sheep were feeding up and down the dale; and they had made them booths of turf and boughs, and were making ready their cooking fires, for it was evening. So when they saw us, they ran to their arms, but we cried out to them in the tongue of the Goths and bade them peace. Then

they came up the bent to us and spake to us in the Gothic tongue, albeit a little diversely from us; and when we had told them what and whence we were, they were glad of us, and bade us to them, and we went, and they entreated us kindly, and made us such cheer as they might, and gave us mutton to eat, and we gave them venison of the wild-wood which we had taken, and we abode with them there that night.

“But they told us that they were a house of the folk of the herdsmen, and that there was war in the land, and that the people thereof were fleeing before the cruelty of a host of warriors, men of a mighty folk, such as the earth hath not heard of, who dwell in great cities far to the south; and how that this host had crossed the mountains, and the Great Water that runneth from them, and had fallen upon their kindred, and overcome their fighting-men, and burned their dwellings, slain their elders, and driven their neat and their sheep, yea, and their women and children in no better wise than their neat and sheep.

“And they said that they had fled away thus far from their old habitations, which were a long way to the south, and were now at point to build them dwellings there in that Dale of the Hazels, and to trust to it that these Welshmen, whom they called Romans, would not follow so far, and that if they did, they might betake them to the wild-wood, and let the thicket cover them, they being so nigh to it.

“Thus they told us; wherefore we sent back one of our fellowship, Birsti of the Geirings, to tell the tale; and one of the herdsmen folk went with him, but we ourselves went onward to hear more of these Romans; for the folk when we asked them, said that they had been in battle against them, but had fled away for fear of their rumour only. Therefore we went on, and a young man of this kindred, who named themselves the Hrutings of the Fell-folk, went along with us. But the others were sore afeard, for all they had weapons.

“So as we went up the land we found they had told us the very sooth, and we met divers Houses, and bands, and broken men, who were fleeing from this trouble, and many of them poor and in misery, having lost their flocks and herds as well as their roofs; and this last be but little loss to them, as their dwellings are but poor, and for the most part they have no tillage. Now of these men, we met not a few who had been in battle with the Roman host, and much they told us of their might not to be dealt with, and their mishandling of those whom they took, both men and women; and at the last we heard true tidings how they had raised them a garth, and made a stronghold in the midst of the land, as men who meant abiding there, so that neither might the winter drive them aback, and that they might be succoured by their people on the other side of the Great River; to which end they have made other garths, though not so great, on the road to that water, and all these well and wisely warded by tried men. For as to the Folks on the other side of the Water, all these lie under their hand already, what by fraud what by force, and their warriors go with them to the battle and help them; of whom we met bands now and again, and fought with them, and took men of them, who told us all this and much more, over long to tell of here.”

He paused and turned about to look on the mighty assembly, and his ears drank in the long murmur that followed his speaking, and when it had died out he spake again, but in rhyme:

“Lo thus much of my tidings! But this too it behoveth to tell,
That these masterful men of the cities of the Markmen know full well:
And they wot of the well-grassed meadows, and the acres of the Mark,
And our life amidst of the wild-wood like a candle in the dark;
And they know of our young men’s valour and our women’s loveliness,
And our tree would they spoil with destruction if its fruit they may never possess.
For their lust is without a limit, and nought may satiate
Their ravening maw; and their hunger if ye check it turneth to hate,
And the blood-fever burns in their bosoms, and torment and anguish and woe
O’er the wide field ploughed by the sword-blade for the coming years they sow;
And ruth is a thing forgotten and all hopes they trample down;
And whatso thing is steadfast, whatso of good renown,
Whatso is fair and lovely, whatso is ancient sooth
In the bloody marl shall they mingle as they laugh for lack of ruth.
Lo the curse of the world cometh hither; for the men that we took in the land
Said thus, that their host is gathering with many an ordered band
To fall on the wild-wood passes and flood the lovely Mark,
As the river over the meadows upriseth in the dark.
Look to it, O ye kindred! availeth now no word
But the voice of the clashing of iron, and the sword-blade on the sword.”

Therewith he made an end, and deeper and longer was the murmur of the host of freemen, amidst which Bork gat him down from the Speech-Hill, his weapons clattering about him, and mingled with the men of his kindred.

Then came forth a man of the kin of the Shieldings of the Upper-mark, and clomb the mound; and he spake in rhyme from beginning to end; for he was a minstrel of renown:

“Lo I am a man of the Shieldings and Geirmund is my name;
 A half-moon back from the wild-wood out into the hills I came,
 And I went alone in my war-gear; for we have affinity
 With the Hundings of the Fell-folk, and with them I fain would be;
 For I loved a maid of their kindred. Now their dwelling was not far
 From the outermost bounds of the Fell-folk, and bold in the battle they are,
 And have met a many people, and held their own abode.
 Gay then was the heart within me, as over the hills I rode
 And thought of the mirth of to-morrow and the sweet-mouthed Hunding maid
 And their old men wise and merry and their young men unafraid,
 And the hall-glee of the Hundings and the healths o’er the guesting cup.
 But as I rode the valley, I saw a smoke go up
 O’er the crest of the last of the grass-hills ’twixt me and the Hunding roof,
 And that smoke was black and heavy: so a while I bided aloof,
 And drew my girths the tighter, and looked to the arms I bore
 And handled my spear for the casting; for my heart misgave me sore,
 For nought was that pillar of smoke like the guest-fain cooking-fire.
 I lingered in thought for a minute, then turned me to ride up higher,
 And as a man most wary up over the bent I rode,
 And nigh hid peered o’er the hill-crest adown on the Hunding abode;
 And forsooth ’twas the fire wavering all o’er the roof of old,
 And all in the garth and about it lay the bodies of the bold;
 And bound to a rope amidmost were the women fair and young,
 And youths and little children, like the fish on a withy strung
 As they lie on the grass for the angler before the beginning of night.
 Then the rush of the wrath within me for a while nigh blinded my sight;
 Yet about the cowering war-thralls, short dark-faced men I saw,
 Men clad in iron armour, this way and that way draw,
 As warriors after the battle are ever wont to do.
 Then I knew them for the foemen and their deeds to be I knew,
 And I gathered the reins together to ride down the hill amain,
 To die with a good stroke stricken and slay ere I was slain.
 When lo, on the bent before me rose the head of a brown-faced man,
 Well helmed and iron-shielded, who some Welsh speech began
 And a short sword brandished against me; then my sight cleared and I saw
 Five others armed in likewise up hill and toward me draw,
 And I shook the spear and sped it and clattering on his shield
 He fell and rolled o’er smitten toward the garth and the Fell-folk’s field.
 “But my heart changed with his falling and the speeding of my stroke,
 And I turned my horse; for within me the love of life awoke,
 And I spurred, nor heeded the hill-side, but o’er rough and smooth I rode
 Till I heard no chase behind me; then I drew rein and abode.
 And down in a dell was I gotten with a thorn-brake in its throat,
 And heard but the plover’s whistle and the blackbird’s broken note
 ‘Mid the thorns; when lo! from a thorn-twigg away the blackbird swept,
 And out from the brake and towards me a naked man there crept,
 And straight I rode up towards him, and knew his face for one
 I had seen in the hall of the Hundings ere its happy days were done.
 I asked him his tale, but he bade me forthright to bear him away;
 So I took him up behind me, and we rode till late in the day,
 Toward the cover of the wild-wood, and as swiftly as we might.
 But when yet aloof was the thicket and it now was moonless night,
 We stayed perforce for a little, and he told me all the tale:
 How the aliens came against them, and they fought without avail
 Till the Roof o’er their heads was burning and they burst forth on the foe,
 And were hewn down there together; nor yet was the slaughter slow.
 But some they saved for thralldom, yea, e’en of the fighting men,
 Or to quell them with pains; so they stripped them; and this man espying just then
 Some chance, I mind not whatwise, from the garth fled out and away.
 “Now many a thing noteworthy of these aliens did he say,
 But this I bid you hearken, lest I wear the time for nought,
 That still upon the Markmen and the Mark they set their thought;
 For they questioned this man and others through a go-between in words
 Of us, and our lands and our chattels, and the number of our swords;
 Of the way and the wild-wood passes and the winter and his ways.
 Now look to see them shortly; for worn are fifteen days
 Since in the garth of the Hundings I saw them dight for war,
 And a hardy folk and ready and a swift-foot host they are.”

Therewith Geirmund went down clattering from the Hill and stood with his company. But a man came forth from the other side of the ring, and clomb the Hill: he was a red-haired man, rather big, clad in a skin coat, and bearing a bow in his hand and a quiver of arrows at his back, and a little axe hung by his side. He said:

“I dwell in the House of the Hrossings of the Mid-mark, and I am now made a man of the kindred: howbeit I was not born into it; for I am the son of a fair and mighty woman of a folk of the Kymry, who was taken in war while she went big with me; I am called Fox the Red.

"These Romans have I seen, and have not died: so hearken! for my tale shall be short for what there is in it.

"I am, as many know, a hunter of Mirkwood, and I know all its ways and the passes through the thicket somewhat better than most.

"A moon ago I fared afoot from Mid-mark through Upper-mark into the thicket of the south, and through it into the heath country; and I went over a neck and came in the early dawn into a little dale when somewhat of mist still hung over it. At the dale's end I saw a man lying asleep on the grass under a quicken tree, and his shield and sword hanging over his head to a bough thereof, and his horse feeding hopped higher up the dale.

"I crept up softly to him with a shaft nocked on the string, but when I drew near I saw him to be of the sons of the Goths. So I doubted nothing, but laid down my bow, and stood upright, and went to him and roused him, and he leapt up, and was wroth.

"I said to him, 'Wilt thou be wroth with a brother of the kindred meeting him in unpeopled parts?'

"But he reached out for his weapons; but ere he could handle them I ran in on him so that he gat not his sword, and had scant time to smite at me with a knife which he drew from his waist.

"I gave way before him for he was a very big man, and he rushed past me, and I dealt him a blow on the side of the head with my little axe which is called the War-babe, and gave him a great wound: and he fell on the grass, and as it happened that was his bane.

"I was sorry that I had slain him, since he was a man of the Goths: albeit otherwise he had slain me, for he was very wroth and dazed with slumber.

"He died not for a while; and he bade me fetch him water; and there was a well hard by on the other side of the tree; so I fetched it him in a great shell that I carry, and he drank. I would have sung the blood-staunching song over him, for I know it well. But he said, 'It availeth nought: I have enough: what man art thou?'

"I said, 'I am a fosterling of the Hrossings, and my mother was taken in war: my name is Fox.'

"Said he; 'O Fox, I have my due at thy hands, for I am a Markman of the Elplings, but a guest of the Burgundians beyond the Great River; and the Romans are their masters and they do their bidding: even so did I who was but their guest: and I a Markman to fight against the Markmen, and all for fear and for gold! And thou an alien-born hast slain their traitor and their dastard! This is my due. Give me to drink again.'

"So did I; and he said; 'Wilt thou do an errand for me to thine own house?' 'Yea,' said I.

"Said he, 'I am a messenger to the garth of the Romans, that I may tell the road to the Mark, and lead them through the thicket; and other guides are coming after me: but not yet for three days or four. So till they come there will be no man in the Roman garth to know thee that thou art not even I myself. If thou art doughty, strip me when I am dead and do my raiment on thee, and take this ring from my neck, for that is my token, and when they ask thee for a word say, "*No limit*"; for that is the token-word. Go south-east over the dales keeping Broadshield-fell square with thy right hand, and let thy wisdom, O Fox, lead thee to the Garth of the Romans, and so back to thy kindred with all tidings thou hast gathered—for indeed they come—a many of them. Give me to drink.'

"So he drank again, and said, 'The bearer of this token is called Hrosstyr of the River Goths. He hath that name among dastards. Thou shalt lay a turf upon my head. Let my death pay for my life.'

"Therewith he fell back and died. So I did as he bade me and took his gear, worth six kine, and did it on me; I laid turf upon him in that dale, and hid my bow and my gear in a blackthorn brake hard by, and then took his horse and rode away.

"Day and night I rode till I came to the garth of the Romans; there I gave myself up to their watchers, and they brought me to their Duke, a grim man and hard. He said in a terrible voice, 'Thy name?' I said, 'Hrosstyr of the River Goths.' He said, 'What limit?' I answered, '*No limit*.' 'The token!' said he, and held out his hand. I gave him the ring. 'Thou art the man,' said he.

"I thought in my heart, 'thou liest, lord,' and my heart danced for joy.

"Then he fell to asking me questions a many, and I answered every one glibly enough, and told him what I would, but no word of truth save for his hurt, and my soul laughed within me

at my lies; thought I, the others, the traitors, shall come, and they shall tell him the truth, and he will not trow it, or at the worst he will doubt them. But me he doubted nothing, else had he called in the tormentors to have the truth of me by pains; as I well saw afterwards, when they questioned with torments a man and a woman of the hill-folk whom they had brought in captive.

"I went from him and went all about that garth espying everything, fearing nothing; albeit there were divers woful captives of the Goths, who cursed me for a dastard, when they saw by my attire that I was of their blood.

"I abode there three days, and learned all that I might of the garth and the host of them, and the fourth day in the morning I went out as if to hunt, and none hindered me, for they doubted me not.

"So I came my ways home to the Upper-mark, and was guested with the Geirings. Will ye that I tell you somewhat of the ways of these Romans of the garth? The time presses, and my tale runneth longer than I would. What will ye?"

Then there arose a murmur, "Tell all, tell all." "Nay," said the Fox, "All I may not tell; so much did I behold there during the three days' stay; but this much it behoveth you to know: that these men have no other thought save to win the Mark and waste it, and slay the fighting men and the old carles, and enthrall such as they will, that is, all that be fair and young, and they long sorely for our women either to have or to sell.

"As for their garth, it is strongly walled about with a dyke newly dug; on the top thereof are they building a wall made of clay, and burned like pots into ashlar stones hard and red, and these are laid in lime.

"It is now the toil of the thralls of our blood whom they have taken, both men and women, to dig that clay and to work it, and bear it to kilns, and to have for reward scant meat and many stripes. For it is a grim folk, that laugheth to see others weep.

"Their men-at-arms are well dight and for the most part in one way: they are helmed with iron, and have iron on their breasts and reins, and bear long shields that cover them to the knees. They are girt with a sax and have a heavy casting-spear. They are dark-skinned and ugly of aspect, surly and of few words: they drink little, and eat not much.

"They have captains of tens and of hundreds over them, and that war-duke over all; he goeth to and fro with gold on his head and his breast, and commonly hath a cloak cast over him of the colour of the crane's-bill blossom.

"They have an altar in the midst of their burg, and thereon they sacrifice to their God, who is none other than their banner of war, which is an image of the ravening eagle with outspread wings; but yet another God they have, and look you! it is a wolf, as if they were of the kin of our brethren; a she-wolf and two man-children at her dugs; wonderful is this.

"I tell you that they are grim; and know it by this token: those captains of tens, and of hundreds, spare not to smite the warriors with staves even before all men, when all goeth not as they would; and yet, though they be free men, and mighty warriors, they endure it and smite not in turn. They are a most evil folk.

"As to their numbers, they of the burg are hard on three thousand footmen of the best; and of horsemen five hundred, nowise good; and of bowmen and slingers six hundred or more: their bows weak; their slingers cunning beyond measure. And the talk is that when they come upon us they shall have with them some five hundred warriors of the Over River Goths, and others of their own folk."

Then he said:

"O men of the Mark, will ye meet them in the meadows and the field,
Or will ye flee before them and have the wood for a shield?
Or will ye wend to their war-burg with weapons cast away,
With your women and your children, a peace of them to pray?
So doing, not all shall perish; but most shall long to die
Ere in the garths of the Southland two moons have loitered by."

Then rose the rumour loud and angry mingled with the rattle of swords and the clash of spears on shields; but Fox said:

"Needs must ye follow one of these three ways. Nay, what say I? there are but two ways and not three; for if ye flee they shall follow you to the confines of the earth. Either these Welsh shall take all, and our lives to boot, or we shall hold to all that is ours, and live merrily. The sword doometh; and in three days it may be the courts shall be hallowed: small is the space

between us.”

Therewith he also got him down from the Hill, and joined his own house: and men said that he had spoken well and wisely. But there arose a noise of men talking together on these tidings; and amidst it an old warrior of the Nether-mark strode forth and up to the Hill-top. Gaunt and stark he was to look on; and all men knew him and he was well-beloved, so all held their peace as he said:

“I am Otter of the Laxings: now needeth but few words till the War-duke is chosen, and we get ready to wend our ways in arms. Here have ye heard three good men and true tell of our foes, and this last, Fox the Red, hath seen them and hath more to tell when we are on the way; nor is the way hard to find. It were scarce well to fall upon these men in their garth and war-burg; for hard is a wall to slay. Better it were to meet them in the Wild-wood, which may well be a friend to us and a wall, but to them a net. O Agni of the Daylings, thou warder of the Thing-stead, bid men choose a War-duke if none gainsay it.”

And without more words he clattered down the Hill, and went and stood with the Laxing band. But the old Dayling arose and blew the horn, and there was at once a great silence, amidst which he said:

“Children of Slains-father, doth the Folk go to the war?”

There was no voice but shouted “yea,” and the white swords sprang aloft, and the westering sun swept along a half of them as they tossed to and fro, and the others showed dead-white and fireless against the dark wood.

Then again spake Agni:

“Will ye choose the War-duke now and once, or shall it be in a while, after others have spoken?”

And the voice of the Folk went up, “Choose! Choose!”

Said Agni: “Sayeth any aught against it?” But no voice of a gainsayer was heard, and Agni said:

“Children of Tyr, what man will ye have for a leader and a duke of war?”

Then a great shout sprang up from amidst the swords: “We will have Thiodolf; Thiodolf the Wolfing!”

Said Agni: “I hear no other name; are ye of one mind? hath any aught to say against it? If that be so, let him speak now, and not forbear to follow in the wheatfield of the spears. Speak, ye that will not follow Thiodolf!”

No voice gainsaid him: then said the Dayling: “Come forth thou War-duke of the Markmen! take up the gold ring from the horns of the altar, set it on thine arm and come up hither!”

Then came forth Thiodolf into the sun, and took up the gold ring from where it lay, and did it on his arm. And this was the ring of the leader of the folk whenso one should be chosen: it was ancient and daintily wrought, but not very heavy: so ancient it was that men said it had been wrought by the dwarfs.

So Thiodolf went up on to the hill, and all men cried out on him for joy, for they knew his wisdom in war. Many wondered to see him unhelmed, but they had a deeming that he must have made oath to the Gods thereof and their hearts were glad of it. They took note of the dwarf-wrought hauberk, and even from a good way off they could see what a treasure of smith’s work it was, and they deemed it like enough that spells had been sung over it to make it sure against point and edge: for they knew that Thiodolf was well beloved of the Gods.

But when Thiodolf was on the Hill of Speech, he said:

“Men of the kindreds, I am your War-duke to-day; but it is oftenest the custom when ye go to war to choose you two dukes, and I would it were so now. No child’s play is the work that lies before us; and if one leader chance to fall let there be another to take his place without stop or stay. Thou Agni of the Daylings, bid the Folk choose them another duke if so they will.”

Said Agni: “Good is this which our War-duke hath spoken; say then, men of the Mark, who shall stand with Thiodolf to lead you against the aliens?”

Then was there a noise and a crying of names, and more than two names seemed to be cried out; but by far the greater part named either Otter of the Laxings, or Heriulf of the Wolfings. True it is that Otter was a very wise warrior, and well known to all the men of the Mark; yet so dear was Heriulf to them, that none would have named Otter had it not been mostly their custom not to choose both War-dukes from one House.

Now spake Agni: "Children of Tyr, I hear you name more than one name: now let each man cry out clearly the name he nameth."

So the Folk cried the names once more, but this time it was clear that none was named save Otter and Heriulf; so the Dayling was at point to speak again, but or ever a word left his lips, Heriulf the mighty, the ancient of days, stood forth: and when men saw that he would take up the word there was a great silence. So he spake:

"Hearken, children! I am old and war-wise; but my wisdom is the wisdom of the sword of the mighty warrior, that knoweth which way it should wend, and hath no thought of turning back till it lieth broken in the field. Such wisdom is good against Folks that we have met heretofore; as when we have fought with the Huns, who would sweep us away from the face of the earth, or with the Franks or the Burgundians, who would quell us into being something worser than they be. But here is a new foe, and new wisdom, and that right shift, do we need to meet them. One wise duke have ye gotten, Thiodolf to wit; and he is young beside me and beside Otter of the Laxings. And now if ye must needs have an older man to stand beside him, (and that is not ill) take ye Otter; for old though his body be, the thought within him is keen and supple like the best of Welsh-wrought blades, and it liveth in the days that now are: whereas for me, meseemeth, my thoughts are in the days bygone. Yet look to it, that I shall not fail to lead as the sword of the valiant leadeth, or the shaft shot by the cunning archer. Choose ye Otter; I have spoken over long."

Then spoke Agni the Dayling, and laughed withal: "One man of the Folk hath spoken for Otter and against Heriulf—now let others speak if they will!"

So the cry came forth, "Otter let it be, we will have Otter!"

"Speaketh any against Otter?" said Agni. But there was no voice raised against him.

Then Agni said: "Come forth, Otter of the Laxings, and hold the ring with Thiodolf."

Then Otter went up on to the hill and stood by Thiodolf, and they held the ring together; and then each thrust his hand and arm through the ring and clasped hands together, and stood thus awhile, and all the Folk shouted together.

Then spake Agni: "Now shall we hew the horses and give the gifts to the Gods."

Therewith he and the two War-dukes came down from the hill; and stood before the altar; and the nine warriors of the Daylings stood forth with axes to hew the horses and with copper bowls wherein to catch the blood of them, and each hewed down his horse to the Gods, but the two War-dukes slew the tenth and fairest: and the blood was caught in the bowls, and Agni took a sprinkler and went round about the ring of men, and cast the blood of the Gods'-gifts over the Folk, as was the custom of those days.

Then they cut up the carcases and burned on the altar the share of the Gods, and Agni and the War-dukes tasted thereof, and the rest they bore off to the Daylings' abode for the feast to be holden that night.

Then Otter and Thiodolf spake apart together for awhile, and presently went up again on to the Speech-Hill, and Thiodolf said:

"O kindreds of the Markmen; to-morrow with the day
We shall wend up Mirkwood-water to bar our foes the way;
And there shall we make our wain-burg on the edges of the wood,
Where in the days past over at last the aliens stood,
The Slaughter Tofts ye call it. There tidings shall we get
If the curse of the world is awakened, and the serpent crawlth yet
Amidst the Mirkwood thicket; and when the sooth we know,
Then bearing battle with us through the thicket shall we go,
The ancient Wood-wolf's children, and the People of the Shield,
And the Spear-kin and the Horse-kin, while the others keep the field
About the warded wain-burg; for not many need we there
Where amidst of the thickets' tangle and the woodland net they fare,
And the hearts of the aliens falter and they curse the fight ne'er done,
And wonder who is fighting and which way is the sun."

Thus he spoke; then Agni took up the war-horn again, and blew a blast, and then he cried out:

"Now sunder we the Folk-mote! and the feast is for to-night,
And to-morrow the Wayfaring; But unnamed is the day of the fight;
O warriors, look ye to it that not long we need abide
'Twixt the hour of the word we have spoken, and our fair-fame's blooming tide!
For then 'midst the toil and the turmoil shall we sow the seeds of peace,
And the Kindreds' long endurance, and the Goth-folk's great increase."

Then arose the last great shout, and soberly and in due order, kindred by kindred, they turned and departed from the Thing-stead and went their way through the wood to the abode of the Daylings.

CHAPTER IX—THE ANCIENT MAN OF THE DAYLINGS

There still hung the more part of the stay-at-homes round about the Roof. But on the plain beneath the tofts were all the wains of the host drawn up round about a square like the streets about a market-place; all these now had their tilts rigged over them, some white, some black, some red, some tawny of hue; and some, which were of the Beamings, green like the leafy tree.

The warriors of the host went down into this wain-town, which they had not fenced in any way, since they in no wise looked for any onset there; and there were their thrallsighting the feast for them, and a many of the Dayling kindred, both men and women, went with them; but some men did the Daylings bring into their Roof, for there was room for a good many besides their own folk. So they went over the Bridge of turf into the garth and into the Great Roof of the Daylings; and amongst these were the two War-dukes.

So when they came to the dais it was as fair all round about there as might well be; and there sat elders and ancient warriors to welcome the guests; and among them was the old carle who had sat on the edge of the burg to watch the faring of the host, and had shuddered back at the sight of the Wolfing Banner.

And when the old carle saw the guests, he fixed his eyes on Thiodolf, and presently came up and stood before him; and Thiodolf looked on the old man, and greeted him kindly and smiled on him; but the carle spake not till he had looked on him a while; and at last he fell a-trembling, and reached his hands out to Thiodolf's bare head, and handled his curls and caressed them, as a mother does with her son, even if he be a grizzled-haired man, when there is none by: and at last he said:

"How dear is the head of the mighty, and the apple of the tree
That blooms with the life of the people which is and yet shall be!
It is helmed with ancient wisdom, and the long remembered thought,
That liveth when dead is the iron, and its very rust but nought.
Ah! were I but young as aforetime, I would fare to the battle-stead
And stand amidst of the spear-hail for the praise of the hand and the head!"

Then his hands left Thiodolf's head, and strayed down to his shoulders and his breast, and he felt the cold rings of the hauberk, and let his hands fall down to his side again; and the tears gushed out of his old eyes and again he spake:

"O house of the heart of the mighty, O breast of the battle-lord
Why art thou coldly hidden from the flickering flame of the sword?
I know thee not, nor see thee; thou art as the fells afar
Where the Fathers have their dwelling, and the halls of Godhome are:
The wind blows wild betwixt us, and the cloud-rack flies along,
And high aloft enfoldeth the dwelling of the strong;
They are, as of old they have been, but their hearths flame not for me;
And the kindness of their feast-halls mine eyes shall never see."

Thiodolf's lips still smiled on the old man, but a shadow had come over his eyes and his brow; and the chief of the Daylings and their mighty guests stood by listening intently with the knit brows of anxious men; nor did any speak till the ancient man again betook him to words:

"I came to the house of the foeman when hunger made me a fool;
And the foeman said, 'Thou art weary, lo, set thy foot on the stool;
And I stretched out my feet,—and was shackled: and he spake with a dastard's smile,
'O guest, thine hands are heavy; now rest them for a while!'
So I stretched out my hands, and the hand-gyves lay cold on either wrist:
And the wood of the wolf had been better than that feast-hall, had I wist
That this was the ancient pit-fall, and the long expected trap,
And that now for my heart's desire I had sold the world's goodhap."

Therewith the ancient man turned slowly away from Thiodolf, and departed sadly to his own place. Thiodolf changed countenance but little, albeit those about him looked strangely on him, as though if they durst they would ask him what these words might be, and if he from his hidden knowledge might fit a meaning to them. For to many there was a word of warning in them, and to some an evil omen of the days soon to be; and scarce anyone heard those words but he had a misgiving in his heart, for the ancient man was known to be foreseeing, and wild and strange his words seemed to them.

But Agni would make light of it, and he said: "Asmund the Old is of good will, and wise he is; but he hath great longings for the deeds of men, when he hath tidings of battle; for a great warrior and a red-hand hewer he hath been in times past; he loves the Kindred, and deems it ill if he may not fare afield with them; for the thought of dying in the straw is hateful to him."

"Yea," said another, "and moreover he hath seen sons whom he loved slain in battle; and when he seeth a warrior in his prime he becometh dear to him, and he feareth for him."

"Yet," said a third, "Asmund is foreseeing; and may be, Thiodolf, thou wilt wot of the drift of these words, and tell us thereof."

But Thiodolf spake nought of the matter, though in his heart he pondered it.

So the guests were led to table, and the feast began, within the hall and without it, and wide about the plain; and the Dayling maidens went in bands trimly decked out throughout all the host and served the warriors with meat and drink, and sang the overword to their lays, and smote the harp, and drew the bow over the fiddle till it laughed and wailed and chuckled, and were blithe and merry with all, and great was the glee on the eve of battle. And if Thiodolf's heart were overcast, his face showed it not, but he passed from hall to wain-burg and from wain-burg to hall again blithe and joyous with all men. And thereby he raised the hearts of men, and they deemed it good that they had gotten such a War-duke, meet to uphold all hearts of men both at the feast and in the fray.

CHAPTER X—THAT CARLINE COMETH TO THE ROOF OF THE WOLFINGS

Now it was three days after this that the women were gathering to the Women's-Chamber of the Roof of the Wolfings a little before the afternoon changes into evening. The hearts of most were somewhat heavy, for the doubt wherewith they had watched the departure of the fighting-men still hung about them; nor had they any tidings from the host (nor was it like that they should have). And as they were somewhat down-hearted, so it seemed by the aspect of all things that afternoon. It was not yet the evening, as is aforesaid, but the day was worn and worsened, and all things looked weary. The sky was a little clouded, but not much; yet was it murky down in the south-east, and there was a threat of storm in it, and in the air close round each man's head, and in the very waving of the leafy boughs. There was by this time little doing in field and fold (for the kine were milked), and the women were coming up from the acres and the meadow and over the open ground anigh the Roof; there was the grass worn and dusty, and the women that trod it, their feet were tanned and worn, and dusty also; skin-dry and weary they looked, with the sweat dried upon them; their girt-up gowns grey and lightless, their half-unbound hair blowing about them in the dry wind, which had in it no morning freshness, and no evening coolness.

It was a time when toil was well-nigh done, but had left its aching behind it; a time for folk to sleep and forget for a little while, till the low sun should make it evening, and make all things fair with his level rays; no time for anxious thoughts concerning deeds doing, wherein the anxious ones could do nought to help. Yet such thoughts those stay-at-homes needs must have in the hour of their toil scarce over, their rest and mirth not begun.

Slowly one by one the women went in by the Women's-door, and the Hall-Sun sat on a stone hard by, and watched them as they passed; and she looked keenly at all persons and all things. She had been working in the acres, and her hand was yet on the hoe she had been using, and but for her face her body was as of one resting after toil: her dark blue gown was ungirded, her dark hair loose and floating, the flowers that had wreathed it, now faded, lying strewn upon the grass before her: her feet bare for coolness' sake, her left hand lying loose and open upon her knee.

Yet though her body otherwise looked thus listless, in her face was no listlessness, nor rest: her eyes were alert and clear, shining like two stars in the heavens of dawn-tide; her lips were set close, her brow knit, as of one striving to shape thoughts hard to understand into words that all might understand.

So she sat noting all things, as woman by woman went past her into the hall, till at last she slowly rose to her feet; for there came two young women leading between them that same old carline with whom she had talked on the Hill-of-Speech. She looked on the carline steadfastly, but gave no token of knowing her; but the ancient woman spoke when she came near to the Hall-Sun, and old as her semblance was, yet did her speech sound sweet to the Hall-Sun, and indeed to all those that heard it and she said:

“May we be here to-night, O Hall-Sun, thou lovely Seeress of the mighty Wolfings? may a wandering woman sit amongst you and eat the meat of the Wolfings?”

Then spake the Hall-Sun in a sweet measured voice: “Surely mother: all men who bring peace with them are welcome guests to the Wolfings: nor will any ask thine errand, but we will let thy tidings flow from thee as thou wilt. This is the custom of the kindred, and no word of mine own; I speak to thee because thou hast spoken to me, but I have no authority here, being myself but an alien. Albeit I serve the House of the Wolfings, and I love it as the hound loveth his master who feedeth him, and his master’s children who play with him. Enter, mother, and be glad of heart, and put away care from thee.”

Then the old woman drew nigher to her and sat down in the dust at her feet, for she was now sitting down again, and took her hand and kissed it and fondled it, and seemed loth to leave handling the beauty of the Hall-Sun; but she looked kindly on the carline, and smiled on her, and leaned down to her, and kissed her mouth, and said:

“Damsels, take care of this poor woman, and make her good cheer; for she is wise of wit, and a friend of the Wolfings; and I have seen her before, and spoken with her; and she loveth us. But as for me I must needs be alone in the meads for a while; and it may be that when I come to you again, I shall have a word to tell you.”

Now indeed it was in a manner true that the Hall-Sun had no authority in the Wolfing House; yet was she so well beloved for her wisdom and beauty and her sweet speech, that all hastened to do her will in small matters and in great, and now as they looked at her after the old woman had caressed her, it seemed to them that her fairness grew under their eyes, and that they had never seen her so fair; and the sight of her seemed so good to them, that the outworn day and its weariness changed to them, and it grew as pleasant as the first hours of the sunlight, when men arise happy from their rest, and look on the day that lieth hopeful before them with all its deeds to be.

So they grew merry, and they led the carline into the Hall with them, and set her down in the Women’s-Chamber, and washed her feet, and gave her meat and drink, and bade her rest and think of nothing troublous, and in all wise made her good cheer; and she was merry with them, and praised their fairness and their deftness, and asked them many questions about their weaving and spinning and carding; (howbeit the looms were idle as then because it was midsummer, and the men gone to the war). And this they deemed strange, as it seemed to them that all women should know of such things; but they thought it was a token that she came from far away.

But afterwards she sat among them, and told them pleasant tales of past times and far countries, and was blithe to them and they to her and the time wore on toward nightfall in the Women’s-Chamber.

CHAPTER XI—THE HALL-SUN SPEAKETH

But for the Hall-Sun; she sat long on that stone by the Women’s-door; but when the evening was now come, she arose and went down through the cornfields and into the meadow, and wandered away as her feet took her.

Night was falling by then she reached that pool of Mirkwood-water, whose eddies she knew so well. There she let the water cover her in the deep stream, and she floated down and sported with the ripples where the river left that deep to race over the shallows; and the moon was casting shadows by then she came up the bank again by the shallow end bearing in her arms a bundle of the blue-flowering mouse-ear. Then she clad herself at once, and went straight as one with a set purpose toward the Great Roof, and entered by the Man’s-door; and there were few men within and they but old and heavy with the burden of years and the coming of night-tide; but they wondered and looked to each other and nodded their heads as she passed them by, as men who would say, There is something toward.

So she went to her sleeping-place, and did on fresh raiment, and came forth presently clad in white and shod with gold and having her hair wreathed about with the herb of wonder, the blue-flowering mouse-ear of Mirkwood-water. Thus she passed through the Hall, and those elders were stirred in their hearts when they beheld her beauty. But she opened the door of the Women’s-Chamber, and stood on the threshold; and lo, there sat the carline amidst a ring of the Wolfing women, and she telling them tales of old time such as they had not yet heard; and her eyes were glittering, and the sweet words were flowing from her mouth; but she sat straight up like a young woman; and at whiles it seemed to those who hearkened, that she

was no old and outworn woman, but fair and strong, and of much avail. But when she heard the Hall-Sun she turned and saw her on the threshold, and her speech fell suddenly, and all that might and briskness faded from her, and she fixed her eyes on the Hall-Sun and looked wistfully and anxiously on her.

Then spake the Hall-Sun standing in the doorway:

"Hear ye a matter, maidens, and ye Wolfing women all,
And thou alien guest of the Wolfings! But come ye up the hall,
That the ancient men may hearken: for methinks I have a word
Of the battle of the Kindreds, and the harvest of the sword."

Then all arose up with great joy, for they knew that the tidings were good, when they looked on the face of the Hall-Sun and beheld the pride of her beauty unmarred by doubt or pain.

She led them forth to the dais, and there were the sick and the elders gathered and some ancient men of the thralls: so she stepped lightly up to her place, and stood under her namesake, the wondrous lamp of ancient days. And thus she spake:

"On my soul there lies no burden, and no tangle of the fight
In plain or dale or wild-wood enmeshes now my sight.
I see the Markmen's wain-burg, and I see their warriors go
As men who wait for battle and the coming of the foe.
And they pass 'twixt the wood and the wain-burg within earshot of the horn,
But over the windy meadows no sound thereof is borne,
And all is well amongst them. To the burg I draw anigh
And I see all battle-banners in the breeze of morning fly,
But no Wolfings round their banner and no warrior of the Shield,
No Geiring and no Hrossing in the burg or on the field."

She held her peace for a little while, and no one dared to speak; then she lifted up her head and spake:

"Now I go by the lip of the wild-wood and a sound withal I hear,
As of men in the paths of the thicket, and a many drawing anear.
Then, muffled yet by the tree-boles, I hear the Shielding song,
And warriors blithe and merry with the battle of the strong.
Give back a little, Markmen, make way for men to pass
To your ordered battle-dwelling o'er the trodden meadow-grass,
For alive with men is the wild-wood and shineth with the steel,
And hath a voice most merry to tell of the Kindreds' weal,
'Twixt each tree a warrior standeth come back from the spear-strewn way,
And forth they come from the wild-wood and a little band are they."

Then again was she silent; but her head sank not, as of one thinking, as before it did, but she looked straight forward with bright eyes and smiling, as she said:

"Lo, now the guests they are bringing that ye have not seen before;
Yet guests but ill-entreated; for they lack their shields of war,
No spear in the hand they carry and with no sax are girt.
Lo, these are the dreaded foemen, these once so strong to hurt;
The men that all folk fled from, the swift to drive the spoil,
The men that fashioned nothing but the trap to make men toil.
They drew the sword in the cities, they came and struck the stroke
And smote the shield of the Markmen, and point and edge they broke.
They drew the sword in the war-garth, they swore to bring aback
God's gifts from the Markmen houses where the tables never lack.
O Markmen, take the God-gifts that came on their own feet
O'er the hills through the Mirkwood thicket the Stone of Tyr to meet!"

Again she stayed her song, which had been loud and joyous, and they who heard her knew that the Kindreds had gained the day, and whilst the Hall-Sun was silent they fell to talking of this fair day of battle and the taking of captives. But presently she spread out her hands again and they held their peace, and she said:

"I see, O Wolfing women, and many a thing I see,
But not all things, O elders, this eve shall ye learn of me,
For another mouth there cometh: the thicket I behold
And the Sons of Tyr amidst it, and I see the oak-trees old,
And the war-shout ringing round them; and I see the battle-lord
Unhelmed amidst of the mighty; and I see his leaping sword;
Strokes struck and warriors falling, and the streaks of spears I see,
But hereof shall the other tell you who speaketh after me.
For none other than the Shieldings from out the wood have come,
And they shift the turn with the Daylings to drive the folk-spear home,
And to follow with the Wolfings and thrust the war-beast forth.
And so good men deem the tidings that they bid them journey north
On the feet of a Shielding runner, that Gisli hath to name;
And west of the water he wendeth by the way that the Wolfings came;

Now for sleep he tarries never, and no meat is in his mouth
 Till the first of the Houses hearkeneth the tidings of the south;
 Lo, he speaks, and the mead-sea sippeth, and the bread by the way doth eat,
 And over the Geiring threshold and outward pass his feet;
 And he breasts the Burg of the Daylings and saith his happy word,
 And stayeth to drink for a minute of the waves of Battleford.
 Lone then by the stream he runneth, and wendeth the wild-wood road,
 And dasheth through the hazels of the Oselings' fair abode,
 And the Elking women know it, and their hearts are glad once more,
 And ye—yea, hearken, Wolfings, for his feet are at the door.”

CHAPTER XII—TIDINGS OF THE BATTLE IN MIRKWOOD

As the Hall-Sun made an end they heard in good sooth the feet of the runner on the hard ground without the hall, and presently the door opened and he came leaping over the threshold, and up to the table, and stood leaning on it with one hand, his breast heaving with his last swift run. Then he spake presently:

“I am Gisli of the Shieldings: Otter sendeth me to the Hall-Sun; but on the way I was to tell tidings to the Houses west of the Water: so have I done. Now is my journey ended; for Otter saith: ‘Let the Hall-Sun note the tidings and send word of them by four of the lightest limbed of the women, or by lads a-horseback, both west and east of the Water; let her send the word as it seemeth to her, whether she hath seen it or not. I will drink a short draught since my running is over.’”

Then a damsel brought him a horn of mead and let it come into his hand, and he drank sighing with pleasure, while the damsel for pleasure of him and his tidings laid her hand on his shoulder. Then he set down the horn and spake:

“We, the Shieldings, with the Geirings, the Hrossings, and the Wolfings, three hundred warriors and more, were led into the Wood by Thiodolf the War-duke, beside whom went Fox, who hath seen the Romans. We were all afoot; for there is no wide way through the Wood, nor would we have it otherwise, lest the foe find the thicket easy. But many of us know the thicket and its ways; so we made not the easy hard. I was near the War-duke, for I know the thicket and am light-foot: I am a bowman. I saw Thiodolf that he was unhelmed and bore no shield, nor had he any coat of fence; nought but a deer-skin frock.”

As he said that word, the carline, who had drawn very near to him and was looking hard at his face, turned and looked on the Hall-Sun and stared at her till she reddened under those keen eyes: for in her heart began to gather some knowledge of the tale of her mother and what her will was.

But Gisli went on: “Yet by his side was his mighty sword, and we all knew it for Throng-plough, and were glad of it and of him and the unfenced breast of the dauntless. Six hours we went spreading wide through the thicket, not always seeing one another, but knowing one another to be nigh; those that knew the thicket best led, the others followed on. So we went till it was high noon on the plain and glimmering dusk in the thicket, and we saw nought, save here and there a roe, and here and there a sounder of swine, and coneys where it was opener, and the sun shone and the grass grew for a little space. So came we unto where the thicket ended suddenly, and there was a long glade of the wild-wood, all set about with great oak-trees and grass thereunder, which I knew well; and thereof the tale tells that it was a holy place of the folk who abided in these parts before the Sons of the Goths. Now will I drink.”

So he drank of the horn and said: “It seemeth that Fox had a deeming of the way the Romans should come; so now we abided in the thicket without that glade and lay quiet and hidden, spreading ourselves as much about that lawn of the oak-trees as we might, the while Fox and three others crept through the wood to spy what might be toward: not long had they been gone ere we heard a war-horn blow, and it was none of our horns: it was a long way off, but we looked to our weapons: for men are eager for the foe and the death that cometh, when they lie hidden in the thicket. A while passed, and again we heard the horn, and it was nigher and had a marvellous voice; then in a while was a little noise of men, not their voices, but footsteps going warily through the brake to the south, and twelve men came slowly and warily into that oak-lawn, and lo, one of them was Fox; but he was clad in the raiment of the dastard of the Goths whom he had slain. I tell you my heart beat, for I saw that the others were Roman men, and one of them seemed to be a man of authority, and he held Fox by the shoulder, and pointed to the thicket where we lay, and something he said to him, as we saw by his gesture and face, but his voice we heard not, for he spake soft.

“Then of those ten men of his he sent back two, and Fox going between them, as though

he should be slain if he misled them; and he and the eight abided there wisely and warily, standing silently some six feet from each other, moving scarce at all, but looking like images fashioned of brown copper and iron; holding their casting-spears (which be marvellous heavy weapons) and girt with the sax.

“As they stood there, not out of earshot of a man speaking in his wonted voice, our War-duke made a sign to those about him, and we spread very quietly to the right hand and the left of him once more, and we drew as close as might be to the thicket’s edge, and those who had bows the highest thereto. Thus then we abided a while again; and again came the horn’s voice; for belike they had no mind to come their ways covertly because of their pride.

“Soon therewithal comes Fox creeping back to us, and I saw him whisper into the ear of the War-duke, but heard not the word he said. I saw that he had hanging to him two Roman saxes, so I deemed he had slain those two, and so escaped the Romans. Maidens, it were well that ye gave me to drink again, for I am weary and my journey is done.”

So again they brought him the horn, and made much of him; and he drank, and then spake on.

“Now heard we the horn’s voice again quite close, and it was sharp and shrill, and nothing like to the roar of our battle-horns: still was the wood and no wind abroad, not even down the oak-lawn; and we heard now the tramp of many men as they thrashed through the small wood and bracken of the thicket-way; and those eight men and their leader came forward, moving like one, close up to the thicket where I lay, just where the path passed into the thicket beset by the Sons of the Goths: so near they were that I could see the dints upon their armour, and the strands of the wire on their sax-handles. Down then bowed the tall bracken on the further side of the wood-lawn, the thicket crashed before the march of men, and on they strode into the lawn, a goodly band, wary, alert, and silent of cries.

“But when they came into the lawn they spread out somewhat to their left hands, that is to say on the west side, for that way was the clear glade; but on the east the thicket came close up to them and edged them away. Therein lay the Goths.

“There they stayed awhile, and spread out but a little, as men marching, not as men fighting. A while we let them be; and we saw their captain, no big man, but dight with very fair armour and weapons; and there drew up to him certain Goths armed, the dastards of the folk, and another unarmed, an old man bound and bleeding. With these Goths had the captain some converse, and presently he cried out two or three words of Welsh in a loud voice, and the nine men who were ahead shifted them somewhat away from us to lead down the glade westward.

“The prey had come into the net, but they had turned their faces toward the mouth of it.

“Then turned Thiodolf swiftly to the man behind him who carried the war-horn, and every man handled his weapons: but that man understood, and set the little end to his mouth, and loud roared the horn of the Markmen, and neither friend nor foe misdoubted the tale thereof. Then leaped every man to his feet, all bow-strings twanged and the cast-spears flew; no man forebore to shout; each as he might leapt out of the thicket and fell on with sword and axe and spear, for it was from the bowmen but one shaft and no more.

“Then might you have seen Thiodolf as he bounded forward like the wild-cat on the hare, how he had no eyes for any save the Roman captain. Foemen enough he had round about him after the two first bounds from the thicket; for the Romans were doing their best to spread, that they might handle those heavy cast-spears, though they might scarce do it, just come out of the thicket as they were, and thrust together by that onslaught of the kindreds falling on from two sides and even somewhat from behind. To right and left flashed Throng-plough, while Thiodolf himself scarce seemed to guide it: men fell before him at once, and close at his heels poured the Wolfing kindred into the gap, and in a minute of time was he amidst of the throng and face to face with the gold-dight captain.

“What with the sweep of Throng-plough and the Wolfing onrush, there was space about him for a great stroke; he gave a side-long stroke to his right and hewed down a tall Burgundian, and then up sprang the white blade, but ere its edge fell he turned his wrist, and drove the point through that Captain’s throat just above the ending of his hauberk, so that he fell dead amidst of his folk.

“All the four kindreds were on them now, and amidst them, and needs must they give way: but stoutly they fought; for surely no other warriors might have withstood that onslaught of the Markmen for the twinkling of an eye: but had the Romans had but the space to have

spread themselves out there, so as to handle their shot-weapons, many a woman's son of us had fallen; for no man shielded himself in his eagerness, but let the swiftness of the Onset of point-and-edge shield him; which, sooth to say, is often a good shield, as here was found.

"So those that were unslain and unhurt fled west along the glade, but not as dastards, and had not Thiodolf followed hard in the chase according to his wont, they might even yet have made a fresh stand and spread from oak-tree to oak-tree across the glade: but as it befel, they might not get a fair offing so as to disentangle themselves and array themselves in good order side by side; and whereas the Markmen were fleet of foot, and in the woods they knew, there were a many aliens slain in the chase or taken alive unhurt or little hurt: but the rest fled this way and that way into the thicket, with whom were some of the Burgundians; so there they abide now as outcasts and men unholy, to be slain as wild-beasts one by one as we meet them.

"Such then was the battle in Mirkwood. Give me the mead-horn that I may drink to the living and the dead, and the memory of the dead, and the deeds of the living that are to be."

So they brought him the horn, and he waved it over his head and drank again and spake:

"Sixty and three dead men of the Romans we counted there up and down that oak-glade; and we cast earth over them; and three dead dastards of the Goths, and we left them for the wolves to deal with. And twenty-five men of the Romans we took alive to be for hostages if need should be, and these did we Shielding men, who are not very many, bring aback to the wain-burg; and the Daylings, who are a great company, were appointed to enter the wood and be with Thiodolf; and me did Otter bid to bear the tidings, even as I have told you. And I have not loitered by the way."

Great then was the joy in the Hall; and they took Gisli, and made much of him, and led him to the bath, and clad him in fine raiment taken from the coffer which was but seldom opened, because the cloths it held were precious; and they set a garland of green wheat-ears on his head. Then they fell to and spread the feast in the hall; and they ate and drank and were merry.

But as for speeding the tidings, the Hall-Sun sent two women and two lads, all a-horseback, to bear the words: the women to remember the words which she taught them carefully, the lads to be handy with the horses, or in the ford, or the swimming of the deeps, or in the thicket. So they went their ways, down the water: one pair went on the western side, and the other crossed Mirkwood-water at the shallows (for being Midsummer the water was but small), and went along the east side, so that all the kindred might know of the tidings and rejoice.

Great was the glee in the Hall, though the warriors of the House were away, and many a song and lay they sang: but amidst the first of the singing they bethought them of the old woman, and would have bidden her tell them some tale of times past, since she was so wise in the ancient lore. But when they sought for her on all sides she was not to be found, nor could anyone remember seeing her depart from the Hall. But this had they no call to heed, and the feast ended, as it began, in great glee.

Albeit the Hall-Sun was troubled about the carline, both that she had come, and that she had gone: and she determined that the next time she met her she would strive to have of her a true tale of what she was, and of all that was toward.

CHAPTER XIII—THE HALL-SUN SAITH ANOTHER WORD

It was no later than the next night, and a many of what thralls were not with the host were about in the feast-hall with the elders and lads and weaklings of the House; for last night's tidings had drawn them thither. Gisli had gone back to his kindred and the wain-burg in the Upper-mark, and the women were sitting, most of them, in the Women's-Chamber, some of them doing what little summer work needed doing about the looms, but more resting from their work in field and acre.

Then came the Hall-Sun forth from her room clad in glittering raiment, and summoned no one, but went straight to her place on the dais under her namesake the Lamp, and stood there a little without speaking. Her face was pale now, her lips a little open, her eyes set and staring as if they saw nothing of all that was round about her.

Now went the word through the Hall and the Women's-Chamber that the Hall-Sun would speak again, and that great tidings were toward; so all folk came flock-meal to the dais, both thralls and free; and scarce were all gathered there, ere the Hall-Sun began speaking, and said:

"The days of the world thrust onward, and men are born therein

A many and a many, and divers deeds they win
 In the fashioning of stories for the kindreds of the earth,
 A garland interwoven of sorrow and of mirth.
 To the world a warrior cometh; from the world he passeth away,
 And no man then may sunder his good from his evil day.
 By the Gods hath he been tormented, and been smitten by the foe:
 He hath seen his maiden perish, he hath seen his speech-friend go:
 His heart hath conceived a joyance and hath brought it unto birth:
 But he hath not carried with him his sorrow or his mirth.
 He hath lived, and his life hath fashioned the outcome of the deed,
 For the blossom of the people, and the coming kindreds' seed.
 "Thus-wise the world is fashioned, and the new sun of the morn
 Where earth last night was desert beholds a kindred born,
 That to-morrow and to-morrow blossoms all gloriously
 With many a man and maiden for the kindreds yet to be,
 And fair the Goth-folk groweth. And yet the story saith
 That the deeds that make the summer make too the winter's death,
 That summer-tides unceasing from out the grave may grow
 And the spring rise up unblemished from the bosom of the snow.
 "Thus as to every kindred the day comes once for all
 When yesterday it was not, and to-day it builds the hall,
 So every kindred bideth the night-tide of the day,
 Whereof it knoweth nothing, e'en when noon is past away.
 E'en thus the House of the Wolfings 'twixt dusk and dark doth stand,
 And narrow is the pathway with the deep on either hand.
 On the left are the days forgotten, on the right the days to come,
 And another folk and their story in the stead of the Wolfing home.
 Do the shadows darken about it, is the even here at last?
 Or is this but a storm of the noon-tide that the wind is driving past?
 "Unscathed as yet it standeth; it bears the stormy drift,
 Nor bows to the lightening flashing adown from the cloudy lift.
 I see the hail of battle and the onslaught of the strong,
 And they go adown to the folk-mote that shall bide there over long.
 I see the slain-heaps rising and the alien folk prevail,
 And the Goths give back before them on the ridge o'er the treeless vale.
 I see the ancient fallen, and the young man smitten dead,
 And yet I see the War-duke shake Throng-plough o'er his head,
 And stand unhelmed, unbyrned before the alien host,
 And the hurt men rise around him to win back battle lost;
 And the wood yield up her warriors, and the whole host rushing on,
 And the swaying lines of battle until the lost is won.
 Then forth goes the cry of triumph, as they ring the captives round
 And cheat the crow of her portion and heap the warriors' mound.
 There are faces gone from our feast-hall not the least beloved nor worst,
 But the wane of the House of the Wolfings not yet the world hath cursed.
 The sun shall rise to-morrow on our cold and dewy roof,
 For they that longed for slaughter were slaughtered far aloof."

She ceased for a little, but her countenance, which had not changed during her song, changed not at all now: so they all kept silence although they were rejoicing in this new tale of victory; for they deemed that she was not yet at the end of her speaking. And in good sooth she spake again presently, and said:

"I wot not what hath befallen nor where my soul may be,
 For confusion is within me and but dimly do I see,
 As if the thing that I look on had happened a while ago.
 They stand by the tofts of a war-garth, a captain of the foe,
 And a man that is of the Goth-folk, and as friend and friend they speak,
 But I hear no word they are saying, though for every word I seek.
 And now the mist flows round me and blind I come aback
 To the House-roof of the Wolfings and the hearth that hath no lack."

Her voice grew weaker as she spake the last words, and she sank backward on to her chair: her clenched hands opened, the lids fell down over her bright eyes, her breast heaved no more as it had done, and presently she fell asleep.

The folk were doubtful and somewhat heavy-hearted because of those last words of hers; but they would not ask her more, or rouse her from her sleep, lest they should grieve her; so they departed to their beds and slept for what was yet left of the night.

CHAPTER XIV—THE HALL-SUN IS CAREFUL CONCERNING THE PASSES OF THE WOOD

In the morning early folk arose; and the lads and women who were not of the night-shift got them ready to go to the mead and the acres; for the sunshine had been plenty these last days and the wheat was done blossoming, and all must be got ready for harvest. So they broke their fast, and got their tools into their hands: but they were somewhat heavy-hearted because of

those last words of the Hall-Sun, and the doubt of last night still hung about them, and they were scarcely as merry as men are wont to be in the morning.

As for the Hall-Sun, she was afoot with the earliest, and was no less, but mayhap more merry than her wont was, and was blithe with all, both old and young.

But as they were at the point of going she called to them, and said:

“Tarry a little, come ye all to the dais and hearken to me.”

So they all gathered thereto, and she stood in her place and spake.

“Women and elders of the Wolfings, is it so that I spake somewhat of tidings last night?”

“Yea,” said they all.

She said, “And was it a word of victory?”

They answered “yea” again.

“Good is that,” she said; “doubt ye not! there is nought to unsay. But hearken! I am nothing wise in war like Thiodolf or Otter of the Laxings, or as Heriulf the Ancient was, though he was nought so wise as they be. Nevertheless ye shall do well to take me for your captain, while this House is bare of warriors.”

“Yea, yea,” they said, “so will we.”

And an old warrior, hight Sorli, who sat in his chair, no longer quite way-worthy, said:

“Hall-Sun, this we looked for of thee; since thy wisdom is not wholly the wisdom of a spae-wife, but rather is of the children of warriors: and we know thine heart to be high and proud, and that thy death seemeth to thee a small matter beside the life of the Wolfing House.”

Then she smiled and said, “Will ye all do my bidding?”

And they all cried out heartily, “Yea, Hall-Sun, that will we.”

She said: “Hearken then; ye all know that east of Mirkwood-water, when ye come to the tofts of the Bearings, and their Great Roof, the thicket behind them is close, but that there is a wide way cut through it; and often have I gone there: if ye go by that way, in a while ye come to the thicket’s end and to bare places where the rocks crop up through the gravel and the woodland loam. There breed the coneys without number; and wild-cats haunt the place for that sake, and foxes; and the wood-wolf walketh there in summer-tide, and hard by the she-wolf hath her litter of whelps, and all these have enough; and the bald-head erne hangeth over it and the kite, and also the kestrel, for shrews and mice abound there. Of these things there is none that feareth me, and none that maketh me afraid. Beyond this place for a long way the wood is nowise thick, for first grow ash-trees about the clefts of the rock and also quicken-trees, but not many of either; and here and there a hazel brake easy to thrust through; then comes a space of oak-trees scattered about the lovely wood-lawn, and then at last the beech-wood close above but clear beneath. This I know well, because I myself have gone so far and further; and by this easy way have I gone so far to the south, that I have come out into the fell country, and seen afar off the snowy mountains beyond the Great Water.

“Now fear ye not, but pluck up a heart! For either I have seen it or dreamed it, or thought it, that by this road easy to wend the Romans should come into the Mark. For shall not those dastards and traitors that wear the raiment and bodies of the Goths over the hearts and the lives of foemen, tell them hereof? And will they not have heard of our Thiodolf, and this my holy namesake?

“Will they not therefore be saying to themselves, ‘Go to now, why should we wrench the hinges off the door with plenteous labour, when another door to the same chamber standeth open before us? This House of the Wolfings is the door to the treasure chamber of the Mark-men; let us fall on that at once rather than have many battles for other lesser matters, and then at last have to fight for this also: for having this we have all, and they shall be our thralls, and we may slaughter what we will, and torment what we will and deflower what we will, and make our souls glad with their grief and anguish, and take aback with us to the cities what we will of the thralls, that their anguish and our joy may endure the longer.’ Thus will they say: therefore is it my rede that the strongest and hardest of you women take horse, a ten of you and one to lead besides, and ride the shallows to the Bearing House, and tell them of our rede; which is to watch diligently the ways of the wood; the outgate to the Mark, and the places where the wood is thin and easy to travel on: and ye shall bid them give you of their folk as many as they deem fittest thereto to join your company, so that ye may have a chain of watchers stretching far into the wilds; but two shall lie without the wood, their horses ready for them to leap on and ride on the spur to the wain-burg in the Upper-mark if any tidings

befal.

“Now of these eleven I ordain Hrosshild to be the leader and captain, and to choose for her fellows the stoutest-limbed and heaviest-handed of all the maidens here: art thou content Hrosshild?”

Then stood Hrosshild forth and said nought, but nodded yea; and soon was her choice made amid jests and laughter, for this seemed no hard matter to them.

So the ten got together, and the others fell off from them, and there stood the ten maidens with Hrosshild, well nigh as strong as men, clean-limbed and tall, tanned with sun and wind; for all these were unwearied afield, and oft would lie out a-nights, since they loved the lark’s song better than the mouse’s squeak; but as their kirtles shifted at neck and wrist, you might see their skins as white as privet-flower where they were wont to be covered.

Then said the Hall-Sun: “Ye have heard the word, see ye to it, Hrosshild, and take this other word also: Bid the Bearing stay-at-homes bide not the sword and the torch at home if the Romans come, but hie them over hither, to hold the Hall or live in the wild-wood with us, as need may be; for might bides with many.

“But ye maidens, take this counsel for yourselves; do ye each bear with you a little keen knife, and if ye be taken, and it seem to you that ye may not bear the smart of the Roman torments (for they be wise in tormenting), but will speak and bewray us under them, then thrust this little edge tool into the place of your bodies where the life lieth closest, and so go to the Gods with a good tale in your mouths: so may the Almighty God of Earth speed you, and the fathers of the kindred!”

So she spoke; and they made no delay but each one took what axe or spear or sword she liked best, and two had their bows and quivers of arrows; and so all folk went forth from the Hall.

Soon were the horses saddled and bridled, and the maidens bestrode them joyously and set forth on their way, going down the lanes of the wheat, and rode down speedily toward the shallows of the water, and all cried good speed after them. But the others would turn to their day’s work, and would go about their divers errands. But even as they were at point to sunder, they saw a swift runner passing by those maidens just where the acres joined the meadow, and he waved his hand aloft and shouted to them, but stayed not his running for them, but came up the lanes of the wheat at his swiftest: so they knew at once that this was again a messenger from the host, and they stood together and awaited his coming; and as he drew near they knew him for Egil, the swiftest-footed of the Wolfings; and he gave a great shout as he came among them; and he was dusty and way-worn, but eager; and they received him with all love, and would have brought him to the Hall to wash him and give him meat and drink, and cherish him in all ways.

But he cried out, “To the Speech-Hill first, to the Speech-Hill first! But even before that, one word to thee, Hall-Sun! Saith Thiodolf, Send ye watchers to look to the entrance into Mid-mark, which is by the Bearing dwelling; and if aught untoward befalleth let one ride on the spur with the tidings to the Wain-burg. For by that way also may peril come.”

Then smiled some of the bystanders, and the Hall-Sun said: “Good is it when the thought of a friend stirreth betimes in one’s own breast. The thing is done, Egil; or sawest thou not those ten women, and Hrosshild the eleventh, as thou camest up into the acres?”

Said Egil; “Fair fall thine hand, Hall-Sun! thou art the Wolfings’ Ransom. Wend we now to the Speech-Hill.”

So did they, and every thrall that was about the dwellings, man, woman, and child fared with them, and stood about the Speech-Hill: and the dogs went round about the edge of that assembly, wandering in and out, and sometimes looking hard on some one whom they knew best, if he cried out aloud.

But the men-folk gave all their ears to hearkening, and stood as close as they might.

Then Egil clomb the Speech-Hill, and said.

CHAPTER XV—THEY HEAR TELL OF THE BATTLE ON THE RIDGE

“Ye have heard how the Daylings were appointed to go to help Thiodolf in driving the folk-spear home to the heart of the Roman host. So they went; but six hours thereafter comes one to Otter bidding him send a great part of the kindreds to him; for that he had had tidings that a great host of Romans were drawing near the wood-edge, but were not entered therein, and

that fain would he meet them in the open field.

“So the kindreds drew lots, and the lot fell first to the Elkings, who are a great company, as ye know; and then to the Hartings, the Beamings, the Alftings, the Vallings (also a great company), the Galtings, (and they no lesser) each in their turn; and last of all to the Laxings; and the Oselings prayed to go with the Elkings, and this Otter deemed good, whereas a many of them be bowmen.

“All these then to the number of a thousand or more entered the wood; and I was with them, for in sooth I was the messenger.

“No delay made we in the wood, nor went we over warily, trusting to the warding of the wood by Thiodolf; and there were men with us who knew the paths well, whereof I was one; so we speedily came through into the open country.

“Shortly we came upon our folk and the War-duke lying at the foot of a little hill that went up as a buttress to a long ridge high above us, whereon we set a watch; and a little brook came down the dale for our drink.

“Night fell as we came thither; so we slept for a while, but abode not the morning, and we were afoot (for we had no horses with us) before the moon grew white. We took the road in good order, albeit our folk-banners we had left behind in the burg; so each kindred raised aloft a shield of its token to be for a banner. So we went forth, and some swift footmen, with Fox, who hath seen the Roman war-garth, had been sent on before to spy out the ways of the foemen.

“Two hours after sunrise cometh one of these, and telleth how he hath seen the Romans, and how that they are but a short mile hence breaking their fast, not looking for any onslaught; ‘but,’ saith he, ‘they are on a high ridge whence they can see wide about, and be in no danger of ambush, because the place is bare for the most part, nor is there any cover except here and there down in the dales a few hazels and blackthorn bushes, and the rushes of the becks in the marshy bottoms, wherein a snipe may hide, or a hare, but scarce a man; and note that there is no way up to that ridge but by a spur thereof as bare as my hand; so ye will be well seen as ye wend up thereto.’

“So spake he in my hearing. But Thiodolf bade him lead on to that spur, and old Heriulf, who was standing nigh, laughed merrily and said: ‘Yea, lead on, and speedily, lest the day wane and nothing done save the hunting of snipes.’

“So on we went, and coming to the hither side of that spur beheld those others and Fox with them; and he held in his hand an arrow of the aliens, and his face was all astir with half-hidden laughter, and he breathed hard, and pointed to the ridge, and somewhat low down on it we saw a steel cap and three spear-heads showing white from out a little hollow in its side, but the men hidden by the hollow: so we knew that Fox had been chased, and that the Romans were warned and wary.

“No delay made the War-duke, but led us up that spur, which was somewhat steep; and as we rose higher we saw a band of men on the ridge, a little way down it, not a many; archers and slingers mostly, who abode us till we were within shot, and then sent a few shots at us, and so fled. But two men were hurt with the sling-plummets, and one, and he not grievously, with an arrow, and not one slain.

“Thus we came up on to the ridge, so that there was nothing between us and the bare heavens; thence we looked south-east and saw the Romans wisely posted on the ridge not far from where it fell down steeply to the north; but on the south, that is to say on their left hands, and all along the ridge past where we were stayed, the ground sloped gently to the south-west for a good way, before it fell, somewhat steeply, into another long dale. Looking north we saw the outer edge of Mirkwood but a little way from us, and we were glad thereof; because ere we left our sleeping-place that morn Thiodolf had sent to Otter another messenger bidding him send yet more men on to us in case we should be hard-pressed in the battle; for he had had a late rumour that the Romans were many. And now when he had looked on the Roman array and noted how wise it was, he sent three swift-foot ones to take stand on a high knoll which we had passed on the way, that they might take heed where our folk came out from the wood and give signal to them by the horn, and lead them to where the battle should be.

“So we stood awhile and breathed us, and handled our weapons some half a furlong from the alien host. They had no earth rampart around them, for that ridge is waterless, and they could not abide there long, but they had pitched sharp pales in front of them and they stood in very good order, as if abiding an onslaught, and moved not when they saw us; for that band of

shooters had joined themselves to them already. Taken one with another we deemed them to be more than we were; but their hauberked footmen with the heavy cast-spears not so many as we by a good deal.

“Now we were of mind to fall on them ere they should fall on us; so all such of us as had shot-weapons spread out from our company and went forth a little; and of the others Heriulf stood foremost along with the leaders of the Beamings and the Elkings; but as yet Thiodolf held aback and led the midmost company, as his wont was, and the more part of the Wolfings were with him.

“Thus we ordered ourselves, and awaited a little while yet what the aliens should do; and presently a war-horn blew amongst them, and from each flank of their mailed footmen came forth a many bowmen and slingers and a band of horsemen; and drew within bowshot, the shooters in open array yet wisely, and so fell to on us, and the horsemen hung aback a little as yet.

“Their arrow-shot was of little avail, their bowmen fell fast before ours; but deadly was their sling-shot, and hurt and slew many and some even in our main battle; for they slung round leaden balls and not stones, and they aimed true and shot quick; and the men withal were so light and lithe, never still, but crouching and creeping and bounding here and there, that they were no easier to hit than coney amidst of the fern, unless they were very nigh.

“Howbeit when this storm had endured a while, and we moved but little, and not an inch aback, and gave them shot for shot, then was another horn winded from amongst the aliens; and thereat the bowmen cast down their bows, and the slingers wound their slings about their heads, and they all came on with swords and short spears and feathered darts, running and leaping lustily, making for our flanks, and the horsemen set spurs to their horses and fell on in the very front of our folk like good and valiant men-at-arms.

“That saw Heriulf and his men, and they set up the war-whoop, and ran forth to meet them, axe and sword aloft, terribly yet maybe somewhat unwarily. The archers and slingers never came within sword-stroke of them, but fell away before them on all sides; but the slingers fled not far, but began again with their shot, and slew a many. Then was a horn winded, as if to call back the horsemen, who, if they heard, heeded not, but rode hard on our kindred like valiant warriors who feared not death. Sooth to say, neither were the horses big or good, nor the men fit for the work, saving for their hardihood; and their spears were short withal and their bucklers unhandy to wield.

“Now could it be seen how the Goths gave way before them to let them into the trap, and then closed around again, and the axes and edge weapons went awork hewing as in a wood; and Heriulf towered over all the press, and the Wolf’s-sister flashed over his head in the summer morning.

“Soon was that storm over, and we saw the Goths tossing up their spears over the slain, and horses running loose and masterless adown over the westward-lying slopes, and a few with their riders still clinging to them. Yet some, sore hurt by seeming, galloping toward the main battle of the Romans.

“Unwarily then fared the children of Tyr that were with Heriulf; for by this time they were well nigh within shot of the spears of those mighty footmen of the Romans: and on their flanks were the slingers, and the bowmen, who had now gotten their bows again; and our bowmen, though they shot well and strong, were too few to quell them; and indeed some of them had cast by their bows to join in Heriulf’s storm. Also the lie of the ground was against us, for it sloped up toward the Roman array at first very gently, but afterwards steeply enough to breathe a short-winded man. Also behind them were we of the other kindreds, whom Thiodolf had ordered into the wedge-array; and we were all ready to move forward, so that had they abided somewhat, all had been well and better.

“So did they not, but straightway set up the Victory-whoop and ran forward on the Roman host. And these were so ordered that, as aforesaid, they had before them sharp piles stuck into the earth and pointed against us, as we found afterwards to our cost; and within these piles stood the men some way apart from each other, so as to handle their casting spears, and in three ranks were they ordered and many spears could be cast at once, and if any in the front were slain, his fellow behind him took his place.

“So now the storm of war fell at once upon our folk, and swift and fierce as was their onslaught yet were a many slain and hurt or ever they came to the piles aforesaid. Then saw they death before them and heeded it nought, but tore up the piles and dashed through them,

and fell in on those valiant footmen. Short is the tale to tell: wheresoever a sword or spear of the Goths was upraised there were three upon him, and saith Toti of the Beamings, who was hurt and crawled away and yet lives, that on Heriulf there were six at first and then more; and he took no thought of shielding himself, but raised up the Wolf's-sister and hewed as the woodman in the thicket, when night cometh and hunger is on him. There fell Heriulf the Ancient and many a man of the Beamings and the Elkins with him, and many a Roman.

"But amidst the slain and the hurt our wedge-array moved forward slowly now, warily shielded against the plummets and shafts on either side; and when the Romans saw our unbroken array, and Thiodolf the first with Throng-plough naked in his hand, they chased not such men of ours unhurt or little hurt, as drew aback from before them: so these we took amongst us, and when we had gotten all we might, and held a grim face to the foe, we drew aback little by little, still facing them till we were out of shot of their spears, though the shot of the arrows and the sling-plummets ceased not wholly from us. Thus ended Heriulf's Storm."

Then he rested from his speaking for a while, and none said aught, but they gazed on him as if he bore with him a picture of the battle, and many of the women wept silently for Heriulf, and yet more of the younger ones were wounded to the heart when they thought of the young men of the Elkins, and the Beamings, since with both those houses they had affinity; and they lamented the loves that they had lost, and would have asked concerning their own speech-friends had they durst. But they held their peace till the tale was told out to an end.

Then Egil spake again:

"No long while had worn by in Heriulf's Storm, and though men's hearts were nothing daunted, but rather angered by what had befallen, yet would Thiodolf wear away the time somewhat more, since he hoped for succour from the Wain-burg and the Wood; and he would not that any of these Romans should escape us, but would give them all to Tyr, and to be a following to Heriulf the Old and the Great.

"So there we abided a while moving nought, and Thiodolf stood with Throng-plough on his shoulder, unhelmed, unbyrned, as though he trusted to the kindred for all defence. Nor for their part did the Romans dare to leave their vantage-ground, when they beheld what grim countenance we made them.

"Albeit, when we had thrice made as if we would fall on, and yet they moved not, whereas it trieth a man sorely to stand long before the foeman, and do nought but endure, and whereas many of our bowmen were slain or hurt, and the rest too few to make head against the shot-weapons of the aliens, then at last we began to draw nearer and a little nearer, not breaking the wedge-array; and at last, just before we were within shot of the cast-spears of their main battle, loud roared our war-horn: then indeed we broke the wedge-array, but orderly as we knew how, spreading out from right and left of the War-duke till we were facing them in a long line: one minute we abode thus, and then ran forth through the spear-storm: and even therewith we heard, as it were, the echo of our own horn, and whoso had time to think betwixt the first of the storm and the handstrokes of the Romans deemed that now would be coming fresh kindreds for our helping.

"Not long endured the spear-rain, so swift we were, neither were we in one throng as betid in Heriulf's Storm, but spread abroad, each trusting in the other that none thought of the backward way.

"Though we had the ground against us we dashed like fresh men at their pales, and were under the weapons at once. Then was the battle grim; they could not thrust us back, nor did we break their array with our first storm; man hewed at man as if there were no foes in the world but they two: sword met sword, and sax met sax; it was thrusting and hewing with point and edge, and no long-shafted weapons were of any avail; there we fought hand to hand and no man knew by eyesight how the battle went two yards from where he fought, and each one put all his heart in the stroke he was then striking, and thought of nothing else.

"Yet at the last we felt that they were faltering and that our work was easier and our hope higher; then we cried our cries and pressed on harder, and in that very nick of time there arose close behind us the roar of the Markmen's horn and the cries of the kindreds answering ours. Then such of the Romans as were not in the very act of smiting, or thrusting, or clinging or shielding, turned and fled, and the whoop of victory rang around us, and the earth shook, and past the place of the slaughter rushed the riders of the Goths; for they had sent horsemen to us, and the paths were grown easier for our much treading of them. Then I beheld Thiodolf, that he had just slain a foe, and clear was the space around him, and he rushed sideways and

caught hold of the stirrup of Angantyr of the Bearings, and ran ten strides beside him, and then bounded on afoot swifter than the red horses of the Bearings, urging on the chase, as his wont was.

“But we who were wearier, when we had done our work, stood still between the living and the dead, between the freemen of the Mark and their war-thralls. And in no long while there came back to us Thiodolf and the chasers, and we made a great ring on the field of the slain, and sang the Song of Triumph; and it was the Wolfing Song that we sang.

“Thus then ended Thiodolf’s Storm.”

When he held his peace there was but little noise among the stay-at-homes, for still were they thinking about the deaths of their kindred and their lovers. But Egil spoke again.

“Yet within that ring lay the sorrow of our hearts; for Odin had called a many home, and there lay their bodies; and the mightiest was Heriulf; and the Romans had taken him up from where he fell, and cast him down out of the way, but they had not stripped him, and his hand still gripped the Wolf’s-sister. His shield was full of shafts of arrows and spears; his byrny was rent in many places, his helm battered out of form. He had been grievously hurt in the side and in the thigh by cast-spears or ever he came to hand-blows with the Romans, but moreover he had three great wounds from the point of the sax, in the throat, in the side, in the belly, each enough for his bane. His face was yet fair to look on, and we deemed that he had died smiling.

“At his feet lay a young man of the Beamings in a gay green coat, and beside him was the head of another of his House, but his green-clad body lay some yards aloof. There lay of the Elkins a many. Well may ye weep, maidens, for them that loved you. Now fare they to the Gods a goodly company, but a goodly company is with them.

“Seventy and seven of the Sons of the Goths lay dead within the Roman battle, and fifty-four on the slope before it; and to boot there were twenty-four of us slain by the arrows and plummets of the shooters, and a many hurt withal.

“But there were no hurt men inside the Roman array or before it. All were slain outright, for the hurt men either dragged themselves back to our folk, or onward to the Roman ranks, that they might die with one more stroke smitten.

“Now of the aliens the dead lay in heaps in that place, for grim was the slaughter when the riders of the Bearings and the Wormings fell on the aliens; and a many of the foemen scorned to flee, but died where they stood, craving no peace; and to few of them was peace given. There fell of the Roman footmen five hundred and eighty and five, and the remnant that fled was but little: but of the slingers and bowmen but eighty and six were slain, for they were there to shoot and not to stand; and they were nimble and fleet of foot, men round of limb, very dark-skinned, but not foul of favour.”

Then he said:

“There are men through the dusk a-faring, our speech-fiends and our kin,
No more shall they crave our helping, nor ask what work to win;
They have done their deeds and departed when they had holpen the House,
So high their heads are holden, and their hurts are glorious
With the story of strokes stricken, and new weapons to be met,
And new scowling of foes’ faces, and new curses unknown yet.
Lo, they dight the feast in Godhome, and fair are the tables spread,
Late come, but well-belovéd is every war-worn head,
And the God-folk and the Fathers, as these cross the tinkling bridge,
Crowd round and crave for stories of the Battle on the Ridge.”

Therewith he came down from the Speech-Hill and the women-folk came round about him, and they brought him to the Hall, and washed him, and gave him meat and drink; and then would he sleep, for he was weary.

Howbeit some of the women could not refrain themselves, but must needs ask after their speech-friends who had been in the battle; and he answered as he could, and some he made glad, and some sorry; and as to some, he could not tell them whether their friends were alive or dead. So he went to his place and fell asleep and slept long, while the women went down to acre and meadow, or saw to the baking of bread or the sewing of garments, or went far afield to tend the neat and the sheep.

Howbeit the Hall-Sun went not with them; but she talked with that old warrior, Sorli, who was now halt and grown unmeet for the road, but was a wise man; and she and he together with some old carlines and a few young lads fell to work, and saw to many matters about the Hall and the garth that day; and they got together what weapons there were both for shot

and for the handplay, and laid them where they were handy to come at, and they saw to the meal in the hall that there was provision for many days; and they carried up to a loft above the Women's-Chamber many great vessels of water, lest the fire should take the Hall; and they looked everywhere to the entrances and windows and had fastenings and bolts and bars fashioned and fitted to them; and saw that all things were trim and stout. And so they abided the issue.

CHAPTER XVI—HOW THE DWARF-WROUGHT HAUBERK WAS BROUGHT AWAY FROM THE HALL OF THE DAYLINGS

Now it must be told that early in the morning, after the night when Gisli had brought to the Wolfing Stead the tidings of the Battle in the Wood, a man came riding from the south to the Dayling abode. It was just before sunrise, and but few folk were stirring about the dwellings. He rode up to the Hall and got off his black horse, and tied it to a ring in the wall by the Man's-door, and went in clashing, for he was in his battle-gear, and had a great wide-rimmed helm on his head.

Folk were but just astir in the Hall, and there came an old woman to him, and looked on him and saw by his attire that he was a man of the Goths and of the Wolfing kindred; so she greeted him kindly: but he said:

“Mother, I am come hither on an errand, and time presses.”

Said she: “Yea, my son, or what tidings bearest thou from the south? for by seeming thou art new-come from the host.”

Said he: “The tidings are as yesterday, save that Thiodolf will lead the host through the wild-wood to look for the Romans beyond it: therefore will there soon be battle again. See ye, Mother, hast thou here one that knoweth this ring of Thiodolf's, if perchance men doubt me when I say that I am sent on my errand by him?”

“Yea,” she said, “Agni will know it; since he knoweth all the chief men of the Mark; but what is thine errand, and what is thy name?”

“It is soon told,” said he, “I am a Wolfing hight Thorkettle, and I come to have away for Thiodolf the treasure of the world, the Dwarf-wrought Hauberk, which he left with you when we fared hence to the south three days ago. Now let Agni come, that I may have it, for time presses sorely.”

There were three or four gathered about them now, and a maiden of them said: “Shall I bring Agni hither, mother?”

“What needeth it?” said the carline, “he sleepeth, and shall be hard to awaken; and he is old, so let him sleep. I shall go fetch the hauberk, for I know where it is, and my hand may come on it as easily as on mine own girdle.”

So she went her ways to the treasury where were the precious things of the kindred; the woven cloths were put away in fair coffers to keep them clean from the whirl of the Hall-dust and the reek; and the vessels of gold and some of silver were standing on the shelves of a cupboard before which hung a veil of needlework: but the weapons and war-gear hung upon pins along the wall, and many of them had much fair work on them, and were dight with gold and gems: but amidst them all was the wondrous hauberk clear to see, dark grey and thin, for it was so wondrously wrought that it hung in small compass. So the carline took it down from the pin, and handled it, and marvelled at it, and said:

“Strange are the hands that have passed over thee, sword-rampart, and in strange places of the earth have they dwelt! For no smith of the kindreds hath fashioned thee, unless he had for his friend either a God or a foe of the Gods. Well shalt thou wot of the tale of sword and spear ere thou comest back hither! For Thiodolf shall bring thee where the work is wild.”

Then she went with the hauberk to the new-come warrior, and made no delay, but gave it to him, and said:

“When Agni awaketh, I shall tell him that Thorkettle of the Wolfings hath borne aback to Thiodolf the Treasure of the World, the Dwarf-wrought Hauberk.”

Then Thorkettle took it and turned to go; but even therewith came old Asmund from out of his sleeping-place, and gazed around the Hall, and his eyes fell on the shape of the Wolfing as he was going out of the door, and he asked the carline.

“What doeth he here? What tidings is there from the host? For my soul was nought unquiet last night.”

"It is a little matter," she said; "the War-duke hath sent for the wondrous Byrny that he left in our treasury when he departed to meet the Romans. Belike there shall be a perilous battle, and few hearts need a stout sword-wall more than Thiodolf's."

As she spoke, Thorkettle had passed the door, and got into his saddle, and sat his black horse like a mighty man as he slowly rode down the turf bridge that led into the plain. And Asmund went to the door and stood watching him till he set spurs to his horse, and departed a great gallop to the south. Then said Asmund:

"What then are the Gods devising, what wonders do they will?
What mighty need is on them to work the kindreds ill,
That the seed of the Ancient Fathers and a woman of their kin
With her all unfading beauty must blend herself therein?
Are they fearing lest the kindreds should grow too fair and great,
And climb the stairs of God-home, and fashion all their fate,
And make all earth so merry that it never wax the worse,
Nor need a gift from any, nor prayers to quench the curse?
Fear they that the Folk-wolf, growing as the fire from out the spark
Into a very folk-god, shall lead the weaponed Mark
From wood to field and mountain, to stand between the earth
And the wrights that forge its thraldom and the sword to slay its mirth?
Fear they that the sons of the wild-wood the Loathly Folk shall quell,
And grow into Gods thereafter, and aloof in God-home dwell?"

Therewith he turned back into the Hall, and was heavy-hearted and dreary of aspect; for he was somewhat foreseeing; and it may not be hidden that this seeming Thorkettle was no warrior of the Wolfings, but the Wood-Sun in his likeness; for she had the power and craft of shape-changing.

CHAPTER XVII—THE WOOD-SUN SPEAKETH WITH THIODOLF

Now the Markmen laid Heriulf in howe on the ridge-crest where he had fallen, and heaped a mighty howe over him that could be seen from far, and round about him they laid the other warriors of the kindreds. For they deemed it was fittest that they should lie on the place whose story they had fashioned. But they cast earth on the foemen lower down on the westward-lying bents.

The sun set amidst their work, and night came on; and Thiodolf was weary and would fain rest him and sleep: but he had many thoughts, and pondered whitherward he should lead the folk, so as to smite the Romans once again, and he had a mind to go apart and be alone for rest and slumber; so he spoke to a man of the kindred named Solvi in whom he put all trust, and then he went down from the ridge, and into a little dale on the southwest side thereof, a furlong from the place of the battle. A beck ran down that dale, and the further end of it was closed by a little wood of yew trees, low, but growing thick together, and great grey stones were scattered up and down on the short grass of the dale. Thiodolf went down to the brook-side, and to a place where it trickled into a pool, whence it ran again in a thin thread down the dale, turning aside before it reached the yew-wood to run its ways under low ledges of rock into a wider dale. He looked at the pool and smiled to himself as if he had thought of something that pleased him; then he drew a broad knife from his side, and fell to cutting up turfs till he had what he wanted; and then he brought stones to the place, and built a dam across the mouth of the pool, and sat by on a great stone to watch it filling.

As he sat he strove to think about the Roman host and how he should deal with it; but despite himself his thoughts wandered, and made for him pictures of his life that should be when this time of battle was over; so that he saw nothing of the troubles that were upon his hands that night, but rather he saw himself partaking in the deeds of the life of man. There he was between the plough-stilts in the acres of the kindred when the west wind was blowing over the promise of early spring; or smiting down the ripe wheat in the hot afternoon amidst the laughter and merry talk of man and maid; or far away over Mirkwood-water watching the edges of the wood against the prowling wolf and lynx, the stars just beginning to shine over his head, as now they were; or wending the windless woods in the first frosts before the snow came, the hunter's bow or javelin in hand: or coming back from the wood with the quarry on the sledge across the snow, when winter was deep, through the biting icy wind and the whirl of the drifting snow, to the lights and music of the Great Roof, and the merry talk therein and the smiling of the faces glad to see the hunting-carles come back; and the full draughts of mead, and the sweet rest a night-tide when the north wind was moaning round the ancient home.

All seemed good and fair to him, and whiles he looked around him, and saw the long dale

lying on his left hand and the dark yews in its jaws pressing up against the rock-ledges of the brook, and on his right its windings as the ground rose up to the buttresses of the great ridge. The moon was rising over it, and he heard the voice of the brook as it tinkled over the stones above him; and the whistle of the plover and the laugh of the whimbrel came down the dale sharp and clear in the calm evening; and sounding far away, because the great hill muffled them, were the voices of his fellows on the ridge, and the songs of the warriors and the high-pitched cries of the watch. And this also was a part of the sweet life which was, and was to be; and he smiled and was happy and loved the days that were coming, and longed for them, as the young man longs for the feet of his maiden at the trysting-place.

So as he sat there, the dreams wrapping him up from troublous thoughts, at last slumber overtook him, and the great warrior of the Wolfings sat nodding like an old carle in the chimney ingle, and he fell asleep, his dreams going with him, but all changed and turned to folly and emptiness.

He woke with a start in no long time; the night was deep, the wind had fallen utterly, and all sounds were stilled save the voice of the brook, and now and again the cry of the watchers of the Goths. The moon was high and bright, and the little pool beside him glittered with it in all its ripples; for it was full now and trickling over the lip of his dam. So he arose from the stone and did off his war-gear, casting Throng-plough down into the grass beside him, for he had been minded to bathe him, but the slumber was still on him, and he stood musing while the stream grew stronger and pushed off first one of his turfs and then another, and rolled two or three of the stones over, and then softly thrust all away and ran with a gush down the dale, filling all the little bights by the way for a minute or two; he laughed softly thereat, and stayed the undoing of his kirtle, and so laid himself down on the grass beside the stone looking down the dale, and fell at once into a dreamless sleep.

When he awoke again, it was yet night, but the moon was getting lower and the first beginnings of dawn were showing in the sky over the ridge; he lay still a moment gathering his thoughts and striving to remember where he was, as is the wont of men waking from deep sleep; then he leapt to his feet, and lo, he was face to face with a woman, and she who but the Wood-Sun? and he wondered not, but reached out his hand to touch her, though he had not yet wholly cast off the heaviness of slumber or remembered the tidings of yesterday.

She drew aback a little from him, and his eyes cleared of the slumber, and he saw her that she was scantily clad in black raiment, barefoot, with no gold ring on her arms or necklace on her neck, or crown about her head. But she looked so fair and lovely even in that end of the night-tide, that he remembered all her beauty of the day and the sunshine, and he laughed aloud for joy of the sight of her, and said:

“What aileth thee, O Wood-Sun, and is this a new custom of thy kindred and the folk of God-home that their brides array themselves like thralls new-taken, and as women who have lost their kindred and are outcast? Who then hath won the Burg of the Anses, and clomb the rampart of God-home?”

But she spoke from where she stood in a voice so sweet, that it thrilled to the very marrow of his bones.

“I have dwelt a while with sorrow since we met, we twain, in the wood:
I have mourned, while thou hast been merry, who deemest the war-play good.
For I know the heart of the wilful and how thou wouldst cast away
The rampart of thy life-days, and the wall of my happy day.
Yea I am the thrall of Sorrow; she hath stripped my raiment off
And laid sore stripes upon me with many a bitter scoff.
Still bidding me remember that I come of the God-folk’s kin,
And yet for all my godhead no love of thee may win.”

Then she looked longingly at him a while and at last could no longer refrain her, but drew nigh him and took his hands in hers, and kissed his mouth, and said as she caressed him:

“O where are thy wounds, beloved? how turned the spear from thy breast,
When the storm of war blew strongest, and the best men met the best?
Lo, this is the tale of to-day: but what shall to-morrow tell?
That Thiodolf the Mighty in the fight’s beginning fell;
That there came a stroke ill-stricken, there came an aimless thrust,
And the life of the people’s helper lay quenched in the summer dust.”

He answered nothing, but smiled as though the sound of her voice and the touch of her hand were pleasant to him, for so much love there was in her, that her very grief was scarcely grievous. But she said again:

"Thou sayest it: I am outcast; for a God that lacketh mirth
 Hath no more place in God-home and never a place on earth.
 A man grieves, and he gladdens, or he dies and his grief is gone;
 But what of the grief of the Gods, and the sorrow never undone?
 Yea verily I am the outcast. When first in thine arms I lay
 On the blossoms of the woodland my godhead passed away;
 Thenceforth unto thee was I looking for the light and the glory of life
 And the Gods' doors shut behind me till the day of the uttermost strife.
 And now thou hast taken my soul, thou wilt cast it into the night,
 And cover thine head with the darkness, and turn thine eyes from the light.
 Thou wouldst go to the empty country where never a seed is sown
 And never a deed is fashioned, and the place where each is alone;
 But I thy thrall shall follow, I shall come where thou seemest to lie,
 I shall sit on the howe that hides thee, and thou so dear and nigh!
 A few bones white in their war-gear that have no help or thought,
 Shall be Thiodolf the Mighty, so nigh, so dear—and nought."

His hands strayed over her shoulders and arms, caressing them, and he said softly and lovingly:

"I am Thiodolf the Mighty: but as wise as I may be
 No story of that grave-night mine eyes can ever see,
 But rather the tale of the Wolfings through the coming days of earth,
 And the young men in their triumph and the maidens in their mirth;
 And morn's promise every evening, and each day the promised morn,
 And I amidst it ever reborn and yet reborn.
 This tale I know, who have seen it, who have felt the joy and pain,
 Each fleeing, each pursuing, like the links of the draw-well's chain:
 But that deedless tide of the grave-mound, and the dayless nightless day,
 E'en as I strive to see it, its image wanes away.
 What say'st thou of the grave-mound? shall I be there at all
 When they lift the Horn of Remembrance, and the shout goes down the hall,
 And they drink the Mighty War-duke and Thiodolf the old?
 Nay rather; there where the youngling that longeth to be bold
 Sits gazing through the hall-reek and sees across the board
 A vision of the reaping of the harvest of the sword,
 There shall Thiodolf be sitting; e'en there shall the youngling be
 That once in the ring of the hazels gave up his life to thee."

She laughed as he ended, and her voice was sweet, but bitter was her laugh. Then she said:

"Nay thou shalt be dead, O warrior, thou shalt not see the Hall
 Nor the children of thy people 'twixt the dais and the wall.
 And I, and I shall be living; still on thee shall waste my thought:
 I shall long and lack thy longing; I shall pine for what is nought."

But he smiled again, and said:

"Not on earth shall I learn this wisdom; and how shall I learn it then
 When I lie alone in the grave-mound, and have no speech with men?
 But for thee,—O doubt it nothing that my life shall live in thee,
 And so shall we twain be loving in the days that yet shall be."

It was as if she heard him not; and she fell aback from him a little and stood silently for a while as one in deep thought; and then turned and went a few paces from him, and stooped down and came back again with something in her arms (and it was the hauberk once more), and said suddenly:

"O Thiodolf, now tell me for what cause thou wouldst not bear
 This grey wall of the hammer in the tempest of the spear?
 Didst thou doubt my faith, O Folk-wolf, or the counsel of the Gods,
 That thou needs must cast thee naked midst the flashing battle-rods,
 Or is thy pride so mighty that it seemed to thee indeed
 That death was a better guerdon than the love of the Godhead's seed?"

But Thiodolf said: "O Wood-Sun, this thou hast a right to ask of me, why I have not worn in the battle thy gift, the Treasure of the World, the Dwarf-wrought Hauberk! And what is this that thou sayest? I doubt not thy faith towards me and thine abundant love: and as for the rede of the Gods, I know it not, nor may I know it, nor turn it this way nor that: and as for thy love and that I would choose death sooner, I know not what thou meanest; I will not say that I love thy love better than life itself; for these two, my life and my love, are blended together and may not be sundered.

"Hearken therefore as to the Hauberk: I wot well that it is for no light matter that thou wouldst have me bear thy gift, the wondrous hauberk, into battle; I deem that some doom is wrapped up in it; maybe that I shall fall before the foe if I wear it not; and that if I wear it, somewhat may betide me which is unmeet to betide a warrior of the Wolfings. Therefore will

I tell thee why I have fought in two battles with the Romans with unmailed body, and why I left the hauberk, (which I see that thou bearest in thine arms) in the Roof of the Daylings. For when I entered therein, clad in the hauberk, there came to meet me an ancient man, one of the very valiant of days past, and he looked on me with the eyes of love, as though he had been the very father of our folk, and I the man that was to come after him to carry on the life thereof. But when he saw the hauberk and touched it, then was his love smitten cold with sadness and he spoke words of evil omen; so that putting this together with thy words about the gift, and that thou didst in a manner compel me to wear it, I could not but deem that this mail is for the ransom of a man and the ruin of a folk.

“Wilt thou say that it is not so? then will I wear the hauberk, and live and die happy. But if thou sayest that I have deemed aright, and that a curse goeth with the hauberk, then either for the sake of the folk I will not wear the gift and the curse, and I shall die in great glory, and because of me the House shall live; or else for thy sake I shall bear it and live, and the House shall live or die as may be, but I not helping, nay I no longer of the House nor in it. How sayest thou?”

Then she said:

“Hail be thy mouth, beloved, for that last word of thine,
And the hope that thine heart conceiveth and the hope that is born in mine.
Yea, for a man’s deliverance was the hauberk born indeed
That once more the mighty warrior might help the folk at need.
And where is the curse’s dwelling if thy life be saved to dwell
Amidst the Wolfing warriors and the folk that loves thee well
And the house where the high Gods left thee to be cherished well therein?
“Yea more: I have told thee, beloved, that thou art not of the kin;
The blood in thy body is blended of the wandering Elking race,
And one that I may not tell of, who in God-home hath his place,
And who changed his shape to beget thee in the wild-wood’s leafy roof.
How then shall the doom of the Wolfings be woven in the woof
Which the Norns for thee have shuttled? or shall one man of war
Cast down the tree of the Wolfings on the roots that spread so far?
O friend, thou art wise and mighty, but other men have lived
Beneath the Wolfing roof-tree whereby the folk has thrived.”

He reddened at her word; but his eyes looked eagerly on her. She cast down the hauberk, and drew one step nigher to him. She knitted her brows, her face waxed terrible, and her stature seemed to grow greater, as she lifted up her gleaming right arm, and cried out in a great voice.

“Thou Thiodolf the Mighty! Hadst thou will to cast the net
And tangle the House in thy trouble, it is I would slay thee yet;
For ’tis I and I that love them, and my sorrow would I give,
And thy life, thou God of battle, that the Wolfing House might live.”

Therewith she rushed forward, and cast herself upon him, and threw her arms about him, and strained him to her bosom, and kissed his face, and he her in likewise, for there was none to behold them, and nought but the naked heaven was the roof above their heads.

And now it was as if the touch of her face and her body, and the murmuring of her voice changed and soft close to his ear, as she murmured mere words of love to him, drew him away from the life of deeds and doubts and made a new world for him, wherein he beheld all those fair pictures of the happy days that had been in his musings when first he left the field of the dead.

So they sat down on the grey stone together hand in hand, her head laid upon his shoulder, no otherwise than if they had been two lovers, young and without renown in days of deep peace.

So as they sat, her foot smote on the cold hilts of the sword, which Thiodolf had laid down in the grass; and she stooped and took it up, and laid it across her knees and his as they sat there; and she looked on Throng-plough as he lay still in the sheath, and smiled on him, and saw that the peace-strings were not yet wound about his hilts. So she drew him forth and raised him up in her hand, and he gleamed white and fearful in the growing dawn, for all things had now gotten their colours again, whereas amidst their talking had the night worn, and the moon low down was grown white and pale.

But she leaned aside, and laid her cheek against Thiodolf’s, and he took the sword out of her hand and set it on his knees again, and laid his right hand on it, and said:

“Two things by these blue edges in the face of the dawning I swear;
And first this warrior’s ransom in the coming fight to bear,

And evermore to love thee who hast given me second birth.
 And by the sword I swear it, and by the Holy Earth,
 To live for the House of the Wolfings, and at last to die for their need.
 For though I trow thy saying that I am not one of their seed,
 Nor yet by the hand have been taken and unto the Father shown
 As a very son of the Fathers, yet mid them hath my body grown;
 And I am the guest of their Folk-Hall, and each one there is my friend.
 So with them is my joy and sorrow, and my life, and my death in the end.
 Now whatso doom hereafter my coming days shall bide,
 Thou speech-friend, thou deliverer, thine is this dawning-tide."

She spoke no word to him; but they rose up and went hand in hand down the dale, he still bearing his naked sword over his shoulder, and thus they went together into the yew-copse at the dale's end. There they abode till after the rising of the sun, and each to each spake many loving words at their departure; and the Wood-Sun went her ways at her will.

But Thiodolf went up the dale again, and set Throng-plough in his sheath, and wound the peace-strings round him. Then he took up the hauberk from the grass whereas the Wood-Sun had cast it, and did it on him, as it were of the attire he was wont to carry daily. So he girt Throng-plough to him, and went soberly up to the ridge-top to the folk, who were just stirring in the early morning.

CHAPTER XVIII—TIDINGS BROUGHT TO THE WAIN-BURG

Now it must be told of Otter and they of the Wain-burg how they had the tidings of the overthrow of the Romans on the Ridge, and that Egil had left them on his way to Wolf-stead. They were joyful of the tale, as was like to be, but eager also to strike their stroke at the foemen, and in that mood they abode fresh tidings.

It has been told how Otter had sent the Bearings and the Wormings to the aid of Thiodolf and his folk, and these two were great kindreds, and they being gone, there abode with Otter, one man with another, thralls and freemen, scant three thousand men: of these many were bowmen good to fight from behind a wall or fence, or some such cover, but scarce meet to withstand a shock in the open field. However it was deemed at this time in the Wain-burg that Thiodolf and his men would soon return to them; and in any case, they said, he lay between the Romans and the Mark, so that they had but little doubt; or rather they feared that the Romans might draw aback from the Mark before they could be met in battle again, for as aforesaid they were eager for the fray.

Now it was in the cool of the evening two days after the Battle on the Ridge, that the men, both freemen and thralls, had been disporting themselves in the plain ground without the Burg in casting the spear and putting the stone, and running races a-foot and a-horseback, and now close on sunset three young men, two of the Laxings and one of the Shieldings, and a grey old thrall of that same House, were shooting a match with the bow, driving their shafts at a rushen roundel hung on a pole which the old thrall had dight. Men were peaceful and happy, for the time was fair and calm, and, as aforesaid, they dreaded not the Roman Host any more than if they were Gods dwelling in God-home. The shooters were deft men, and they of the Burg were curious to note their deftness, and many were breathed with the games wherein they had striven, and thought it good to rest, and look on the new sport: so they sat and stood on the grass about the shooters on three sides, and the mead-horn went briskly from man to man; for there was no lack of meat and drink in the Burg, whereas the kindreds that lay nighest to it had brought in abundant provision, and women of the kindreds had come to them, and not a few were there scattered up and down among the carles.

Now the Shielding man, Geirbald by name, had just loosed at the mark, and had shot straight and smitten the roundel in the midst, and a shout went up from the onlookers thereat; but that shout was, as it were, lined with another, and a cry that a messenger was riding toward the Burg: thereat most men looked round toward the wood, because their minds were set on fresh tidings from Thiodolf's company, but as it happened it was from the north and the side toward Mid-mark that they on the outside of the throng had seen the rider coming; and presently the word went from man to man that so it was, and that the new comer was a young man on a grey horse, and would speedily be amongst them; so they wondered what the tidings might be, but yet they did not break up the throng, but abode in their places that they might receive the messenger more orderly; and as the rider drew near, those who were nighest to him perceived that it was a woman.

So men made way before the grey horse, and its rider, and the horse was much spent and travel-worn. So the woman rode right into the ring of warriors, and drew rein there, and

lighted down slowly and painfully, and when she was on the ground could scarce stand for stiffness; and two or three of the swains drew near her to help her, and knew her at once for Hrosshild of the Wolfings, for she was well-known as a doughty woman.

Then she said: "Bring me to Otter the War-duke; or bring him hither to me, which were best, since so many men are gathered together; and meanwhile give me to drink; for I am thirsty and weary."

So while one went for Otter, another reached to her the mead-horn, and she had scarce done her draught, ere Otter was there, for they had found him at the gate of the Burg. He had many a time been in the Wolfing Hall, so he knew her at once and said:

"Hail, Hrosshild! how farest thou?"

She said: "I fare as the bearer of evil tidings. Bid thy folk do on their war-gear and saddle their horses, and make no delay; for now presently shall the Roman host be in Mid-mark!"

Then cried Otter: "Blow up the war-horn! get ye all to your weapons and be ready to leap on your horses, and come ye to the Thing in good order kindred by kindred: later on ye shall hear Hrosshild's story as she shall tell it to me!"

Therewith he led her to a grassy knoll that was hard by, and set her down thereon and himself beside her, and said:

"Speak now, damsel, and fear not! For now shall one fate go over us all, either to live together or die together as the free children of Tyr, and friends of the Almighty God of the Earth. How camest thou to meet the Romans and know of their ways and to live thereafter?"

She said: "Thus it was: the Hall-Sun bethought her how that the eastern ways into Mid-mark that bring a man to the thicket behind the Roof of the Bearings are nowise hard, even for an host; so she sent ten women, and me the eleventh to the Bearing dwelling and the road through the thicket aforesaid; and we were to take of the Bearing stay-at-homes whomso we would that were handy, and then all we to watch the ways for fear of the Romans. And methinks she has had some vision of their ways, though mayhap not altogether clear.

"Anyhow we came to the Bearing dwellings, and they gave us of their folk eight doughty women and two light-foot lads, and so we were twenty and one in all.

"So then we did as the Hall-Sun bade us, and ordained a chain of watchers far up into the waste; and these were to sound a point of war upon their horns each to each till the sound thereof should come to us who lay with our horses hopped ready beside us in the fair plain of the Mark outside the thicket.

"To be short, the horns waked us up in the midst of yesternight, and of the watches also came to us the last, which had heard the sound amidst the thicket, and said that it was certainly the sound of the Goths' horn, and the note agreed on. Therefore I sent a messenger at once to the Wolfing Roof to say what was toward; but to thee I would not ride until I had made surer of the tidings; so I waited awhile, and then rode into the wild-wood; and a long tale I might make both of the waiting and the riding, had I time thereto; but this is the end of it; that going warily a little past where the thicket thinneth and the road endeth, I came on three of those watches or links in the chain we had made, and half of another watch or link; that is to say six women, who were come together after having blown their horns and fled (though they should rather have abided in some lurking-place to espy whatever might come that way) and one other woman, who had been one of the watch much further off, and had spoken with the furthest of all, which one had seen the faring of the Roman Host, and that it was very great, and no mere band of pillagers or of scouts. And, said this fleer (who was indeed half wild with fear), that while they were talking together, came the Romans upon them, and saw them; and a band of Romans beat the wood for them when they fled, and she, the fleer, was at point to be taken, and saw two taken indeed, and haled off by the Roman scourers of the wood. But she escaped and so came to the others on the skirts of the thicket, having left of her skin and blood on many a thornbush and rock by the way.

"Now when I heard this, I bade this fleer get her home to the Bearings as swiftly as she might, and tell her tale; and she went away trembling, and scarce knowing whether her feet were on earth or on water or on fire; but belike failed not to come there, as no Romans were before her.

"But for the others, I sent one to go straight to Wolf-stead on the heels of the first messenger, to tell the Hall-Sun what had befallen, and other five I set to lurk in the thicket, whereas none could lightly lay hands on them, and when they had new tidings, to flee to Wolf-stead as

occasion might serve them; and for myself I tarried not, but rode on the spur to tell thee hereof.

“But my last word to thee, Otter, is that by the Hall-sun’s bidding the Bearings will not abide fire and steel at their own stead, but when they hear true tidings of the Romans being hard at hand, will take with them all that is not too hot or too heavy to carry, and go their ways unto Wolf-stead: and the tidings will go up and down the Mark on both sides of the water, so that whatever is of avail for defence will gather there at our dwelling, and if we fall, goodly shall be the howe heaped over us, even if ye come not in time.

“Now have I told thee what I needs must and there is no need to question me more, for thou hast it all—do thou what thou hast to do!”

With that word she cast herself down on the grass by the mound-side, and was presently asleep, for she was very weary.

But all the time she had been telling her tale had the horn been sounding, and there were now a many warriors gathered and more coming in every moment: so Otter stood up on the mound after he had bidden a man of his House to bring him his horse and war-gear, and abided a little, till, as might be said, the whole host was gathered: then he bade cry silence, and spake:

“Sons of Tyr, now hath an Host of the Romans gotten into the Mark; a mighty host, but not so mighty that it may not be met. Few words are best: let the Steerings, who are not many, but are men well-trying in war and wisdom abide in the Burg along with the fighting thralls: but let the Burg be broken up and moved from the place, and let its warders wend towards Mid-mark, but warily and without haste, and each night let them make the wain-garth and keep good watch.

“But know ye that the Romans shall fall with all their power on the Wolfing dwellings, deeming that when they have that, they shall have all that is ours with ourselves also. For there is the Hall-Sun under the Great Roof, and there hath Thiodolf, our War-duke, his dwelling-place; therefore shall all of us, save those that abide with the wains, take horse, and ride without delay, and cross the water at Battleford, so that we may fall upon the foe before they come west of the water; for as ye know there is but one ford whereby a man wending straight from the Bearings may cross Mirkwood-water, and it is like that the foe will tarry at the Bearing stead long enough to burn and pillage it.

“So do ye order yourselves according to your kindreds, and let the Shieldings lead. Make no more delay! But for me I will now send a messenger to Thiodolf to tell him of the tidings, and then speedily shall he be with us. Geirbald, I see thee; come hither!”

Now Geirbald stood amidst the Shieldings, and when Otter had spoken, he came forth bestriding a white horse, and with his bow slung at his back. Said Otter: “Geirbald, thou shalt ride at once through the wood, and find Thiodolf; and tell him the tidings, and that in nowise he follow the Roman fleers away from the Mark, nor to heed anything but the trail of the foemen through the south-eastern heaths of Mirkwood, whether other Romans follow him or not: whatever happens let him lead the Goths by that road, which for him is the shortest, towards the defence of the Wolfing dwellings. Lo thou, my ring for a token! Take it and depart in haste. Yet first take thy fellow Viglund the Woodman with thee, lest if perchance one fall, the other may bear the message. Tarry not, nor rest till thy word be said!”

Then turned Geirbald to find Viglund who was anigh to him, and he took the ring, and the twain went their ways without more ado, and rode into the wild-wood.

But about the wain-burg was there plenteous stir of men till all was ordered for the departure of the host, which was no long while, for there was nothing to do but on with the war-gear and up on to the horse.

Forth then they went duly ordered in their kindreds towards the head of the Upper-mark, riding as swiftly as they might without breaking their array.

CHAPTER XIX—THOSE MESSENGERS COME TO THIODOLF

Of Geirbald and Viglund the tale tells that they rode the woodland paths as speedily as they might. They had not gone far, and were winding through a path amidst of a thicket mingled of the hornbeam and holly, betwixt the openings of which the bracken grew exceeding tall, when Viglund, who was very fine-eared, deemed that he heard a horse coming to meet them: so they lay as close as they might, and drew back their horses behind a great holly-bush lest it should be some one or more of the foes who had fled into the wood when the Romans were scattered in that first fight. But as the sound drew nearer, and it was clearly the footsteps of a

great horse, they deemed it would be some messenger from Thiodolf, as indeed it turned out: for as the new-comer fared on, somewhat unwarily, they saw a bright helm after the fashion of the Goths amidst of the trees, and then presently they knew by his attire that he was of the Bearings, and so at last they knew him to be Asbiorn of the said House, a doughty man; so they came forth to meet him and he drew rein when he saw armed men, but presently beholding their faces he knew them and laughed on them, and said:

“Hail fellows! what tidings are toward?”

“These,” said Viglund, “that thou art well met, since now shalt thou turn back and bring us to Thiodolf as speedily as may be.”

But Asbiorn laughed and said: “Nay rather turn about with me; or why are ye so grim of countenance?”

“Our errand is no light one,” said Geirbald, “but thou, why art thou so merry?”

“I have seen the Romans fall,” said he, “and belike shall soon see more of that game: for I am on an errand to Otter from Thiodolf: the War-duke, when he had questioned some of those whom we took on the Day of the Ridge, began to have a deeming that the Romans had beguiled us, and will fall on the Mark by the way of the south-east heaths: so now is he hastening to fetch a compass and follow that road either to overtake them or prevent them; and he biddeth Otter tarry not, but ride hard along the water to meet them if he may, or ever they have set their hands to the dwellings of my House. And belike when I have done mine errand to Otter I shall ride with him to look on these burners and slayers once more; therefore am I merry. Now for your tidings, fellows.”

Said Geirbald: “Our tidings are that both our errands are prevented, and come to nought: for Otter hath not tarried, but hath ridden with all his folk toward the stead of thine House. So shalt thou indeed see these burners and slayers if thou ridest hard; since we have tidings that the Romans will by now be in Mid-mark. And as for our errand, it is to bid Thiodolf do even as he hath done. Hereby may we see how good a pair of War-dukes we have gotten, since each thinketh of the same wisdom. Now take we counsel together as to what we shall do; whether we shall go back to Otter with thee, or thou go back to Thiodolf with us; or else each go the road ordained for us.”

Said Asbiorn: “To Otter will I ride as I was bidden, that I may look on the burning of our roof, and avenge me of the Romans afterwards; and I bid you, fellows, ride with me, since fewer men there are with Otter, and he must be the first to bide the brunt of battle.”

“Nay,” said Geirbald, “as for me ye must even lose a man’s aid; for to Thiodolf was I sent, and to Thiodolf will I go: and bethink thee if this be not best, since Thiodolf hath but a deeming of the ways of the Romans and we wot surely of them. Our coming shall make him the speedier, and the less like to turn back if any alien band shall follow after him. What sayest thou, Viglund?”

Said Viglund: “Even as thou, Geirbald: but for myself I deem I may well turn back with Asbiorn. For I would serve the House in battle as soon as may be; and maybe we shall slaughter these kites of the cities, so that Thiodolf shall have no work to do when he cometh.”

Said Asbiorn; “Geirbald, knowest thou right well the ways through the wood and on the other side thereof, to the place where Thiodolf abideth? for ye see that night is at hand.”

“Nay, not over well,” said Geirbald.

Said Asbiorn: “Then I rede thee take Viglund with thee; for he knoweth them yard by yard, and where they be hard and where they be soft. Moreover it were best indeed that ye meet Thiodolf betimes; for I deem not but that he wendeth leisurely, though always warily, because he deemeth not that Otter will ride before to-morrow morning. Harken, Viglund! Thiodolf will rest to-night on the other side of the water, nigh to where the hills break off into the sheer cliffs that are called the Kites’ Nest, and the water runneth under them, coming from the east: and before him lieth the easy ground of the eastern heaths where he is minded to wend to-morrow betimes in the morning: and if ye do your best ye shall be there before he is upon the road, and sure it is that your tidings shall hasten him.”

“Thou sayest sooth,” saith Geirbald, “tarry we no longer; here sunder our ways; farewell!”

“Farewell,” said he, “and thou, Viglund, take this word in parting, that belike thou shalt yet see the Romans, and strike a stroke, and maybe be smitten. For indeed they be most mighty warriors.”

Then made they no delay but rode their ways either side. And Geirbald and Viglund rode

over rough and smooth all night, and were out of the thick wood by day-dawn: and whereas they rode hard, and Viglund knew the ways well, they came to Mirkwood-water before the day was old, and saw that the host was stirring, but not yet on the way. And or ever they came to the water's edge, they were met by Wolfkettle of the Wolfings, and Hiarandi of the Elkings, and three others who were but just come from the place where the hurt men lay down in a dale near the Great Ridge; there had Wolfkettle and Hiarandi been tending Toti of the Beamings, their fellow-in-arms, who had been sorely hurt in the battle, but was doing well, and was like to live. So when they saw the messengers, they came up to them and hailed them, and asked them if the tidings were good or evil.

"That is as it may be," said Geirbald, "but they are short to tell; the Romans are in Mid-mark, and Otter rideth on the spur to meet them, and sendeth us to bid Thiodolf wend the heaths to fall in on them also. Nor may we tarry one minute ere we have seen Thiodolf."

Said Wolfkettle, "We will lead you to him; he is on the east side of the water, with all his host, and they are hard on departing."

So they went down the ford, which was not very deep; and Wolfkettle rode the ford behind Geirbald, and another man behind Viglund; but Hiarandi went afoot with the others beside the horses, for he was a very tall man.

But as they rode amidst the clear water Wolfkettle lifted up his voice and sang:

"White horse, with what are ye laden as ye wade the shallows warm,
But with tidings of the battle, and the fear of the fateful storm?
What loureth now behind us, what pileth clouds before,
On either hand what gathereth save the stormy tide of war?
Now grows midsummer mirky, and fallow falls the morn,
And dusketh the Moon's Sister, and the trees look overworn;
God's Ash tree shakes and shivers, and the sheer cliff standeth white
As the bones of the giants' father when the Gods first fared to fight."

And indeed the morning had grown mirky and grey and threatening, and from far away the thunder growled, and the face of the Kite's Nest showed pale and awful against a dark steely cloud; and a few drops of rain pattered into the smooth water before them from a rag of the cloud-flock right over head. They were in mid stream now, for the water was wide there; on the eastern bank were the warriors gathering, for they had beheld the faring of those men, and the voice of Wolfkettle came to them across the water, so they deemed that great tidings were toward, and would fain know on what errand those were come.

Then the waters of the ford deepened till Hiarandi was wading more than waist-deep, and the water flowed over Geirbald's saddle; then Wolfkettle laughed, and turning as he sat, dragged out his sword, and waved it from east to west and sang:

"O sun, pale up in heaven, shrink from us if thou wilt,
And turn thy face from beholding the shock of guilt with guilt!
Stand still, O blood of summer! and let the harvest fade,
Till there be nought but fallow where once was bloom and blade!
O day, give out but a glimmer of all thy flood of light,
If it be but enough for our eyen to see the road of fight!
Forget all else and slumber, if still ye let us wake,
And our mouths shall make the thunder, and our swords shall the lightning make,
And we shall be the storm-wind and drive the ruddy rain,
Till the joy of our hearts in battle bring back the day again."

As he spake that word they came up through the shallow water dripping on to the bank, and they and the men who abode them on the bank shouted together for joy of fellowship, and all tossed aloft their weapons. The man who had ridden behind Viglund slipped off on to the ground; but Wolfkettle abode in his place behind Geirbald.

So the messengers passed on, and the others closed up round about them, and all the throng went up to where Thiodolf was sitting on a rock beneath a sole ash-tree, the face of the Kite's Nest rising behind him on the other side of a bight of the river. There he sat unhelmed with the dwarf-wrought hauberk about him, holding Throng-plough in its sheath across his knees, while he gave word to this and that man concerning the order of the host.

So when they were come thither, the throng opened that the messengers might come forward; for by this time had many more drawn near to hearken what was toward. There they sat on their horses, the white and the grey, and Wolfkettle stood by Geirbald's bridle rein, for he had now lighted down; and a little behind him, his head towering over the others, stood Hiarandi great and gaunt. The ragged cloud had drifted down south-east now and the rain fell no more, but the sun was still pale and clouded.

Then Thiodolf looked gravely on them, and spake:

“What do ye sons of the War-shield? what tale is there to tell?
Is the kindred fallen tangled in the grasp of the fallow Hell?
Crows the red cock over the homesteads, have we met the foe too late?
For meseems your brows are heavy with the shadowing o’er of fate.”

But Geirbald answered:

“Still cold with dew in the morning the Shielding Roof-ridge stands,
Nor yet hath grey Hell bounden the Shielding warriors’ hands;
But lo, the swords, O War-duke, how thick in the wind they shake,
Because we bear the message that the battle-road ye take,
Nor tarry for the thunder or the coming on of rain,
Or the windy cloudy night-tide, lest your battle be but vain.
And this is the word that Otter yestre’en hath set in my mouth;
Seek thou the trail of the Aliens of the Cities of the South,
And thou shalt find it leading o’er the heaths to the beechen-wood,
And thence to the stony places where the foxes find their food;
And thence to the tangled thicket where the folkway cleaves it through,
To the eastern edge of Mid-mark where the Bearings deal and do.”

Then said Thiodolf in a cold voice, “What then hath befallen Otter?”

Said Geirbald:

“When last I looked upon Otter, all armed he rode the plain,
With his whole host clattering round him like the rush of the summer rain;
To the right or the left they looked not but they rode through the dusk and the dark
Beholding nought before them but the dream of the foes in the Mark.
So he went; but his word fled from him and on my horse it rode,
And again it saith, O War-duke seek thou the Bear’s abode,
And tarry never a moment for ought that seems of worth,
For there shall ye find the sword-edge and the flame of the foes of the earth.

“Tarry not, Thiodolf, nor turn aback though a new foe followeth on thine heels. No need to question me more; I have no more to tell, save that a woman brought these tidings to us, whom the Hall-Sun had sent with others to watch the ways: and some of them had seen the Romans, who are a great host and no band stealing forth to lift the herds.”

Now all those round about him heard his words, for he spake with a loud voice; and they knew what the bidding of the War-duke would be; so they loitered not, but each man went about his business of looking to his war-gear and gathering to the appointed place of his kindred. And even while Geirbald had been speaking, had Hiarandi brought up the man who bore the great horn, who when Thiodolf leapt to his feet to find him, was close at hand. So he bade him blow the war-blast, and all men knew the meaning of that voice of the horn, and every man armed him in haste, and they who had horses (and these were but the Bearings and the Warnings), saddled them, and mounted, and from mouth to mouth went the word that the Romans were gotten into Mid-mark, and were burning the Bearing abodes. So speedily was the whole host ready for the way, the Wolfings at the head of all. Then came forth Thiodolf from the midst of his kindred, and they raised him upon a great war-shield upheld by many men, and he stood thereon and spake:

“O sons of Tyr, ye have vanquished, and sore hath been your pain;
But he that smiteth in battle must ever smite again;
And thus with you it fareth, and the day abideth yet
When ye shall hold the Aliens as the fishes in the net.
On the Ridge ye slew a many; but there came a many more
From their strongholds by the water to their new-built garth of war,
And all these have been led by dastards o’er the way our feet must tread
Through the eastern heaths and the beech-wood to the door of the Bearing stead,
Now e’en yesterday I deemed it, but I durst not haste away
Ere the word was borne to Otter and ’tis he bids haste to-day;
So now by day and by night-tide it behoveth us to wend
And wind the reel of battle and weave its web to end.
Had ye deemed my eyes foreseeing, I would tell you of my sight,
How I see the folk delivered and the Aliens turned to flight,
While my own feet wend them onwards to the ancient Father’s Home.
But belike these are but the visions that to many a man shall come
When he goeth adown to the battle, and before him riseth high
The wall of valiant foemen to hide all things anigh.
But indeed I know full surely that no work that we may win
To-morrow or the next day shall quench the Markmen’s kin.
On many a day hereafter shall their warriors carry shield;
On many a day their maidens shall drive the kine afield,
On many a day their reapers bear sickle in the wheat
When the golden wind-wrought ripple stirs round the feast-hall’s feet.
Lo, now is the day’s work easy—to live and overcome,
Or to die and yet to conquer on the threshold of the Home.”

And therewith he gat him down and went a-foot to the head of the Wolfing band, a great shout going with him, which was mingled with the voice of the war-horn that bade away.

So fell the whole host into due array, and they were somewhat over three thousand warriors, all good and tried men and meet to face the uttermost of battle in the open field; so they went their ways with all the speed that footmen may, and in fair order; and the sky cleared above their heads, but the distant thunder still growled about the world. Geirbald and Viglund joined themselves to the Wolfings and went a-foot along with Wolfkettle; but Hiarandi went with his kindred who were second in the array.

CHAPTER XX—OTTER AND HIS FOLK COME INTO MID-MARK

Otter and his folk rode their ways along Mirkwood-water, and made no stay, except now and again to breathe their horses, till they came to Battleford in the early morning; there they baited their horses, for the grass was good in the meadow, and the water easy to come at.

So after they had rested there a short hour, and had eaten what was easy for them to get, they crossed the ford, and wended along Mirkwood-water between the wood and the river, but went slower than before lest they should weary their horses; so that it was high-noon before they had come out of the woodland way into Mid-mark; and at once as soon as the whole plain of the Mark opened out before them, they saw what most of them looked to see (since none doubted Hrosshild's tale), and that was a column of smoke rising high and straight up into the air, for the afternoon was hot and windless. Great wrath rose in their hearts thereat, and many a strong man trembled for anger, though none for fear, as Otter raised his right hand and stretched it out towards that token of wrack and ruin; yet they made no stay, nor did they quicken their pace much; because they knew that they should come to Bearham before night-fall, and they would not meet the Romans way-worn and haggard; but they rode on steadily, a terrible company of wrathful men.

They passed by the dwellings of the kindreds, though save for the Galtings the houses on the east side of the water between the Bearings and the wild-wood road were but small; for the thicket came somewhat near to the water and pinched the meadows. But the Galtings were great hunters and trackers of the wild-wood, and they of the Geddings, the Erings and the Withings, which were smaller Houses, lived somewhat on the take of fish from Mirkwood-water (as did the Laxings also of the Nether-mark), for thereabout were there goodly pools and eddies, and sun-warmed shallows therewithal for the spawning of the trouts; as there were eyots in the water, most of which tailed off into a gravelly shallow at their lower ends.

Now as the riders of the Goths came over against the dwellings of the Withings, they saw people, mostly women, driving up the beasts from the meadow towards the garth; but upon the tofts about their dwellings were gathered many folk, who had their eyes turned toward the token of ravage that hung in the sky above the fair plain; but when these beheld the riding of the host, they tossed up their arms to them and whatever they bore in them, and the sound of their shrill cry (for they were all women and young lads) came down the wind to the ears of the riders. But down by the river on a swell of the ground were some swains and a few thralls, and among them some men armed and a-horseback; and these, when they perceived the host coming on turned and rode to meet them; and as they drew near they shouted as men overjoyed to meet their kindred; and indeed the fighting-men of their own House were riding in the host. And the armed men were three old men, and one very old with marvellous long white hair, and four long lads of some fifteen winters, and four stout carles of the thralls bearing bows and bucklers, and these rode behind the swains; so they found their own kindred and rode amongst them.

But when they were all jingling and clashing on together, the dust arising from the sun-dried turf, the earth shaking with the thunder of the horse-hoofs, then the heart of the long-hoary one stirred within him as he bethought him of the days of his youth, and to his old nostrils came the smell of the horses and the savour of the sweat of warriors riding close together knee to knee adown the meadow. So he lifted up his voice and sang:

"Rideth lovely along
The strong by the strong;
Soft under his breath
Singeth sword in the sheath,
And shield babbleth oft
Unto helm-crest aloft;
How soon shall their words rise mid wrath of the battle
Into wrangle unheeded of clanging and rattle,
And no man shall note then the gold on the sword

When the runes have no meaning, the mouth-cry no word,
 When all mingled together, the war-sea of men
 Shall toss up the steel-spray round fourscore and ten.

“Now as maids burn the weed
 Betwixt acre and mead,
 So the Bearings’ Roof
 Burneth little aloof,
 And red gloweth the hall
 Betwixt wall and fair wall,
 Where often the mead-sea we sipped in old days,
 When our feet were a-weary with wending the ways;
 When the love of the lovely at even was born,
 And our hands felt fair hands as they fell on the horn.
 There round about standeth the ring of the foe
 Tossing babes on their spears like the weeds o’er the low.

“Ride, ride then! nor spare
 The red steeds as ye fare!
 Yet if daylight shall fail,
 By the fire-light of bale
 Shall we see the bleared eyes
 Of the war-learned, the wise.
 In the acre of battle the work is to win,
 Let us live by the labour, sheaf-smiting therein;
 And as oft o’er the sickle we sang in time past
 When the crake that long mocked us fled light at the last,
 So sing o’er the sword, and the sword-hardened hand
 Bearing down to the reaping the wrath of the land.”

So he sang; and a great shout went up from his kindred and those around him, and it was taken up all along the host, though many knew not why they shouted, and the whole host quickened its pace, and went a great trot over the smooth meadow.

So in no long while were they come over against the stead of the Erings, and thereabouts were no beasts afield, and no women, for all the neat were driven into the garth of the House; but all they who were not war-fit were standing without doors looking down the Mark towards the reck of the Bearing dwellings, and these also sent a cry of welcome toward the host of their kindred. But along the river-bank came to meet the host an armed band of two old men, two youths who were their sons, and twelve thralls who were armed with long spears; and all these were a-horseback: so they fell in with their kindred and the host made no stay for them, but pressed on over-running the meadow. And still went up that column of smoke, and thicker and blacker it grew a-top, and ruddier amidmost.

So came they by the abode of the Geddings, and there also the neat and sheep were close in the home-garth: but armed men were lying or standing about the river bank, talking or singing merrily none otherwise than though deep peace were on the land; and when they saw the faring of the host they sprang to their feet with a shout and gat to their horses at once: they were more than the other bands had been, for the Geddings were a greater House; they were seven old men, and ten swains, and ten thralls bearing long spears like to those of the Erings; and no sooner had they fallen in with their kindred, than the men of the host espied a greater company yet coming to meet them: and these were of the folk of the Galtings; and amongst them were ten warriors in their prime, because they had but of late come back from the hunting in the wood and had been belated from the muster of the kindreds; and with them were eight old men and fifteen lads, and eighteen thralls; and the swains and thralls all bore bows besides the swords that they were girt withal, and not all of them had horses, but they who had none rode behind the others: so they joined themselves to the host, shouting aloud; and they had with them a great horn that they blew on till they had taken their place in the array; and whereas their kindred was with Thiodolf, they followed along with the hinder men of the Shieldings.

So now all the host went on together, and when they had passed the Galting abodes, there was nothing between them and Bearham, nor need they look for any further help of men; there were no beasts afield nor any to herd them, and the stay-at-homes were within doors dighting them for departure into the wild-wood if need should be: but a little while after they had passed these dwellings came into the host two swains of about twenty winters, and a doughty maid, their sister, and they bare no weapons save short spears and knives; they were wet and dripping with the water, for they had just swum Mirkwood-water. They were of the Wolfing House, and had been shepherding a few sheep on the west side of the water, when they saw the host faring to battle, and might not refrain them, but swam their horses across the swift deeps to join their kindred to live and die with them. The tale tells that they three

fought in the battles that followed after, and were not slain there, though they entered them unarmed, but lived long years afterwards: of them need no more be said.

Now, when the host was but a little past the Galting dwellings men began to see the flames mingled with the smoke of the burning, and the smoke itself growing thinner, as though the fire had over-mastered everything and was consuming itself with its own violence; and somewhat afterwards, the ground rising, they could see the Bearing meadow and the foemen thereon: yet a little further, and from the height of another swelling of the earth they could see the burning houses themselves and the array of the Romans; so there they stayed and breathed their horses a while. And they beheld how of the Romans a great company was gathered together in close array betwixt the ford and the Bearing Hall, but nigher unto the ford, and these were a short mile from them; but others they saw streaming out from the burning dwellings, as if their work were done there, and they could not see that they had any captives with them. Other Romans there were, and amongst them men in the attire of the Goths, busied about the river banks, as though they were going to try the ford.

But a little while abode Otter in that place, and then waved his arm and rode on and all the host followed; and as they drew nigher, Otter, who was wise in war, beheld the Romans and deemed them a great host, and the very kernel and main body of them many more than all his company; and moreover they were duly and well arrayed as men waiting a foe; so he knew that he must be wary or he would lose himself and all his men.

So he stayed his company when they were about two furlongs from them, and the main body of the foe stirred not, but horsemen and slingers came forth from its sides and made on toward the Goths, and in three or four minutes were within bowshot of them. Then the bowmen of the Goths slipped down from their horses and bent their bows and nocked their arrows and let fly, and slew and hurt many of the horsemen, who endured their shot but for a minute or two and then turned rein and rode back slowly to their folk, and the slingers came not on very eagerly whereas they were dealing with men a-horseback, and the bowmen of the Goths also held them still.

Now turned Otter to his folk and made them a sign, which they knew well, that they should get down from their horses; and when they were afoot the leaders of tens and hundreds arrayed them, into the wedge-array, with the bowmen on either flank: and Otter smiled as he beheld this adoin and that the Romans meddled not with them, belike because they looked to have them good cheap, since they were but a few wild men.

But when they were all arrayed he sat still on his horse and spake to them short and sharply, saying:

“Men of the Goths, will ye mount your horses again and ride into the wood and let it cover you, or will ye fight these Romans?” They answered him with a great shout and the clashing of their weapons on their shields. “That is well,” quoth Otter, “since we have come so far; for I perceive that the foe will come to meet us, so that we must either abide their shock or turn our backs. Yet must we fight wisely or we are undone, and Thiodolf in risk of undoing; this have we to do if we may, to thrust in between them and the ford, and if we may do that, there let us fight it out, till we fall one over another. But if we may not do it, then will we not throw our lives away but do the foemen what hurt we may without mingling ourselves amongst them, and so abide the coming of Thiodolf; for if we get not betwixt them and the ford we may in no case hinder them from crossing. And all this I tell you that ye may follow me wisely, and refrain your wrath that ye may live yet to give it the rein when the time comes.”

So he spake and got down from his horse and drew his sword and went to the head of the wedge-array and began slowly to lead forth; but the thralls and swains had heed of the horses, and they drew aback with them towards the wood which was but a little way from them.

But for Otter he led his men down towards the ford, and when the Romans saw that, their main body began to move forward, faring slant-wise, as a crab, down toward the ford; then Otter hastened somewhat, as he well might, since his men were well learned in war and did not break their array; but now by this time were those burners of the Romans come up with the main battle, and the Roman captain sent them at once against the Goths, and they advanced boldly enough, a great cloud of men in loose array who fell to with arrows and slings on the wedge-array and slew and hurt many: yet did not Otter stay his folk; but it was ill going for them, for their unshielded sides were turned to the Romans, nor durst Otter scatter his bowmen out from the wedge-array, lest the Romans, who were more than they, should enter in amongst them. Ever he gazed earnestly on the main battle of the Romans, and what they

were doing, and presently it became clear to him that they would outgo him and come to the ford, and then he wotted well that they would set on him just when their light-armed were on his flank and his rearward, and then it would go hard but they would break their array and all would be lost: therefore he slackened his pace and went very slowly and the Romans went none the slower for that; but their light-armed grew bolder and drew more together as they came nigher to the Goths, as though they would give them an onset; but just at that nick of time Otter passed the word down the ranks, and, waving his sword, turned sharply to the right and fell with all the wedge-array on the clustering throng of the light-armed, and his bowmen spread out now from the right flank of the wedge-array, and shot sharp and swift and the bowmen on the left flank ran forward swiftly till they had cleared the wedge-array and were on the flank of the light-armed Romans; and they, what between the onset of the swordsmen and spearmen of the Goths, and their sharp arrows, knew not which way to turn, and a great slaughter befell amongst them, and they of them were the happiest who might save themselves by their feet.

Now after this storm, and after these men had been thrust away, Otter stayed not, but swept round about the field toward the horses; and indeed he looked to it that the main-battle of the Romans should follow him, but they did not, but stayed still to receive the fleers of their light-armed. And this indeed was the goodhap of the Goths; for they were somewhat disordered by their chase of the light-armed, and they smote and spared not, their hearts being full of bitter wrath, as might well be; for even as they turned on the Romans, they beheld the great roof of the Bearings fall in over the burned hall, and a great shower of sparks burst up from its fall, and there were the ragged gables left standing, licked by little tongues of flame which could not take hold of them because of the clay which filled the spaces between the great timbers and was daubed over them. And they saw that all the other houses were either alight or smouldering, down to the smallest cot of a thrall, and even the barns and booths both great and little.

Therefore, whereas the Markmen were far fewer in all than the Roman main-battle, and whereas this same host was in very good array, no doubt there was that the Markmen would have been grievously handled had the Romans fallen on; but the Roman Captain would not have it so: for though he was a bold man, yet was his boldness that of the wolf, that falleth on when he is hungry and skulketh when he is full. He was both young and very rich, and a mighty man among his townsmen, and well had he learned that ginger is hot in the mouth, and though he had come forth to the war for the increasing of his fame, he had no will to die among the Markmen, either for the sake of the city of Rome, or of any folk whatsoever, but was liefer to live for his own sake. Therefore was he come out to vanquish easily, that by his fame won he might win more riches and dominion in Rome; and he was well content also to have for his own whatever was choice amongst the plunder of these wild-men (as he deemed them), if it were but a fair woman or two. So this man thought, It is my business to cross the ford and come to Wolfstead, and there take the treasure of the tribe, and have a stronghold there, whence we may slay so many of these beasts with little loss to us that we may march away easily and with our hands full, even if Maenius with his men come not to our aid, as full surely he will: therefore as to these angry men, who be not without might and conduct in battle, let us remember the old saw that saith 'a bridge of gold to a fleeing foe,' and let them depart with no more hurt of Romans, and seek us afterwards when we are fenced into their stead, which shall then be our stronghold: even so spake he to his Captains about him.

For it must be told that he had no tidings of the overthrow of the Romans on the Ridge; nor did he know surely how many fighting-men the Markmen might muster, except by the report of those dastards of the Goths; and though he had taken those two women in the wastes, yet had he got no word from them, for they did as the Hall-Sun bade them, when they knew that they would be questioned with torments, and smiting themselves each with a little sharp knife, so went their ways to the Gods.

Thus then the Roman Captain let the Markmen go their ways, and turned toward the ford, and the Markmen went slowly now toward their horses. Howbeit there were many of them who murmured against Otter, saying that it was ill done to have come so far and ridden so hard, and then to have done so little, and that were to-morrow come, they would not be led away so easily: but now they said it was ill; for the Romans would cross the water, and make their ways to Wolfstead, none hindering them, and would burn the dwellings and slay the old men and thralls, and have away the women and children and the Hall-Sun the treasure of the Markmen. In sooth, they knew not that a band of the Roman light-armed had already

crossed the water, and had fallen upon the dwellings of the Wolfings; but that the old men and younglings and thralls of the House had come upon them as they were entangled amidst the tofts and the garths, and had overcome them and slain many.

Thus went Otter and his men to their horses when it was now drawing toward sunset (for all this was some while adoin), and betook them to a rising ground not far from the wood-side, and there made what sort of a garth they might, with their horses and the limbs of trees and long-shafted spears; and they set a watch and abode in the garth right warily, and lighted no fires when night fell, but ate what meat they had with them, which was but little, and so sleeping and watching abode the morning. But the main body of the Romans did not cross the ford that night, for they feared lest they might go astray therein, for it was an ill ford to those that knew not the water: so they abode on the bank nigh to the water's edge, with the mind to cross as soon as it was fairly daylight.

Now Otter had lost of his men some hundred and twenty slain or grievously hurt, and they had away with them the hurt men and the bodies of the slain. The tale tells not how many of the Romans were slain, but a many of their light-armed had fallen, since the Markmen had turned so hastily upon them, and they had with them many of the best bowmen of the Mark.

CHAPTER XXI—THEY BICKER ABOUT THE FORD

In the grey of the morning was Otter afoot with the watchers, and presently he got on his horse and peered over the plain, but the mist yet hung low on it, so that he might see nought for a while; but at last he seemed to note something coming toward the host from the upper water above the ford, so he rode forward to meet it, and lo, it was a lad of fifteen winters, naked save his breeches, and wet from the river; and Otter drew rein, and the lad said to him: "Art thou the War-duke?" "Yea," said Otter.

Said the lad, "I am Ali, the son of Grey, and the Hall-Sun hath sent me to thee with this word: 'Are ye coming? Is Thiodolf at hand? For I have seen the Roof-ridge red in the sunlight as if it were painted with cinnabar.'"

Said Otter, "Art thou going back to Wolfstead, son?"

"Yea, at once, my father," said Ali.

"Then tell her," said Otter, "that Thiodolf is at hand, and when he cometh we shall both together fall upon the Romans either in crossing the ford or in the Wolfing meadow; but tell her also that I am not strong enough to hinder the Romans from crossing."

"Father," said Ali, "the Hall-Sun saith: Thou art wise in war; now tell us, shall we hold the Hall against the Romans that ye may find us there? For we have discomfited their vanguard already, and we have folk who can fight; but belike the main battle of the Romans shall get the upper hand of us ere ye come to our helping: belike it were better to leave the hall, and let the wood cover us."

"Now is this well asked," said Otter; "get thee back, my son, and bid the Hall-Sun trust not to warding of the Hall, for the Romans are a mighty host: and this day, even when Thiodolf cometh hither, shall be hard for the Goth-folk: let her hasten lest these thieves come upon her hastily; let her take the Hall-Sun her namesake, and the old men and children and the women, and let those fighting folk she hath be a guard to all this in the wood. And hearken moreover; it will, maybe, be six hours ere Thiodolf cometh; tell her I will cast the dice for life or death, and stir up these Romans now at once, that they may have other things to think of than burning old men and women and children in their dwellings; thus may she reach the wood unhindered. Hast thou all this in thine head? Then go thy ways."

But the lad lingered, and he reddened and looked on the ground and then he said: "My father, I swam the deeps, and when I reached this bank, I crept along by the mist and the reeds toward where the Romans are, and I came near to them, and noted what they were doing; and I tell thee that they are already stirring to take the water at the ford. Now then do what thou wilt."

Therewith he turned about, and went his way at once, running like a colt which has never felt halter or bit.

But Otter rode back hastily and roused certain men in whom he trusted, and bid them rouse the captains and all the host and bid men get to horse speedily and with as little noise as might be. So did they, and there was little delay, for men were sleeping with one eye open, as folk say, and many were already astir. So in a little while they were all in the saddle, and the mist yet stretched low over the meadow; for the morning was cool and without wind. Then Otter

bade the word be carried down the ranks that they should ride as quietly as may be and fare through the mist to do the Romans some hurt, but in nowise to get entangled in their ranks, and all men to heed well the signal of turning and drawing aback; and therewith they rode off down the meadow led by men who could have led them through the dark night.

But for the Romans, they were indeed getting ready to cross the ford when the mist should have risen; and on the bank it was thinning already and melting away; for a little air of wind was beginning to breathe from the north-east and the sunrise, which was just at hand; and the bank, moreover, was stonier and higher than the meadow's face, which fell away from it as a shallow dish from its rim: thereon yet lay the mist like a white wall.

So the Romans and their friends the dastards of the Goths had well nigh got all ready, and had driven stakes into the water from bank to bank to mark out the safe ford, and some of their light-armed and most of their Goths were by now in the water or up on the Wolfing meadow with the more part of their baggage and wains; and the rest of the host was drawn up in good order, band by band, waiting the word to take the water, and the captain was standing nigh to the river bank beside their God the chief banner of the Host.

Of a sudden one of the dastards of the Goths who was close to the Captain cried out that he heard horse coming; but because he spake in the Gothic tongue, few heeded; but even therewith an old leader of a hundred cried out the same tidings in the Roman tongue, and all men fell to handling their weapons; but before they could face duly toward the meadow, came rushing from out of the mist a storm of shafts that smote many men, and therewithal burst forth the sound of the Markmen's war-horn, like the roaring of a hundred bulls mingled with the thunder of horses at the gallop; and then dark over the wall of mist showed the crests of the riders of the Mark, though scarce were their horses seen till their whole war-rank came dark and glittering into the space of the rising-ground where the mist was but a haze now, and now at last smitten athwart by the low sun just arisen.

Therewith came another storm of shafts, wherein javelins and spears cast by the hand were mingled with the arrows: but the Roman ranks had faced the meadow and the storm which it yielded, swiftly and steadily, and they stood fast and threw their spears, albeit not with such good aim as might have been, because of their haste, so that few were slain by them. And the Roman Captain still loth to fight with the Goths in earnest for no reward, and still more and more believing that this was the only band of them that he had to look to, bade those who were nighest the ford not to tarry for the onset of a few wild riders, but to go their ways into the water; else by a sudden onrush might the Romans have entangled Otter's band in their ranks, and so destroyed all. As it was the horsemen fell not on the Roman ranks full in face, but passing like a storm athwart the ranks to the right, fell on there where they were in thinnest array (for they were gathered to the ford as aforesaid), and slew some and drave some into the deeps and troubled the whole Roman host.

So now the Roman Captain was forced to take new order, and gather all his men together, and array his men for a hard fight; and by now the mist was rolling off from the face of the whole meadow and the sun was bright and hot. His men serried their ranks, and the front rank cast their spears, and slew both men and horses of the Goths as those rode along their front casting their javelins, and shooting here and there from behind their horses if occasion served, or making a shift to send an arrow even as they sat a-horseback; then the second rank of the Romans would take the place of the first, and cast in their turn, and they who had taken the water turned back and took their place behind the others, and many of the light-armed came with them, and all the mass of them flowed forward together, looking as if it might never be broken. But Otter would not abide the shock, since he had lost men and horses, and had no mind to be caught in the sweep of their net; so he made the sign, and his Company drew off to right and left, yet keeping within bowshot, so that the bowmen still loosed at the Romans.

But they for their part might not follow afoot men on untired horses, and their own horse was on the west side with the baggage, and had it been there would have been but of little avail, as the Roman Captain knew. So they stood awhile making grim countenance, and then slowly drew back to the ford under cover of their light-armed who shot at the Goths as they rode forward, but abode not their shock.

But Otter and his folk followed after the Romans again, and again did them some hurt, and at last drew so nigh, that once more the Romans stormed forth, and once more smote a stroke in the air; nor even so would the Markmen cease to meddle with them, though never would Otter suffer his men to be mingled with them. At the last the Romans, seeing that Otter

would not walk into the open trap, and growing weary of this bickering, began to take the water little by little, while a strong Company kept face to the Markmen; and now Otter saw that they would not be hindered any longer, and he had lost many men, and even now feared lest he should be caught in the trap, and so lose all. And on the other hand it was high noon by now, so that he had given respite to the stay-at-homes of the Wolfings, so that they might get them into the wood. So he drew out of bowshot and bade his men breathe their horses and rest themselves and eat something; and they did so gladly, since they saw that they might not fall upon the Romans to live and die for it until Thiodolf was come, or until they knew that he was not coming. But the Romans crossed the ford in good earnest and were soon all gathered together on the western bank making them ready for the march to Wolfstead. And it must be told that the Roman Captain was the more deliberate about this because after the overthrow of his light-armed there the morning before, he thought that the Roof was held by warriors of the kindreds, and not by a few old men, and women, and lads. Therefore he had no fear of their escaping him. Moreover it was this imagination of his, to wit that a strong band of warriors was holding Wolfstead, that made him deem there were no more worth thinking about of the warriors of the Mark save Otter's Company and the men in the Hall of the Wolfings.

CHAPTER XXII—OTTER FALLS ON AGAINST HIS WILL

It was with the same imagination working in him belike that the Roman Captain set none to guard the ford on the westward side of Mirkwood-water. The Romans tarried there but a little hour, and then went their ways; but Otter sent a man on a swift horse to watch them, and when they were clean gone for half an hour, he bade his folk to horse, and they departed, all save a handful of the swains and elders, who were left to tell the tidings to Thiodolf when he should come into Mid-mark.

So Otter and his folk crossed the ford, and drew up in good order on the westward bank, and it was then somewhat more than three hours after noon. He had been there but a little while before he noted a stir in the Bearing meadow, and lo, it was the first of Thiodolf's folk, who had gotten out of the wood and had fallen in with the men whom he had left behind. And these first were the riders of the Bearings, and the Wormings, (for they had out-gone the others who were afoot). It may well be thought how fearful was their anger when they set eyes on the smouldering ashes of the dwellings; nor even when those folk of Otter had told them all they had to tell could some of them refrain them from riding off to the burnt houses to seek for the bodies of their kindred. But when they came there, and amidst the ashes could find no bones, their hearts were lightened, and yet so mad wroth they were, that some could scarce sit their horses, and great tears gushed from the eyes of some, and pattered down like hail-stones, so eager were they to see the blood of the Romans. So they rode back to where they had left their folk talking with them of Otter; and the Bearings were sitting grim upon their horses and somewhat scowling on Otter's men. Then the foremost of those who had come back from the houses waved his hand toward the ford, but could say nought for a while; but the captain and chief of the Bearings, a grizzled man very big of body, whose name was Arinbiorn, spake to that man and said; "What aileth thee Sweinbiorn the Black? What hast thou seen?"

He said:

"Now red and grey is the pavement of the Bearings' house of old:
Red yet is the floor of the dais, but the hearth all grey and cold.
I knew not the house of my fathers; I could not call to mind
The fashion of the building of that Warder of the Wind.
O wide were grown the windows, and the roof exceeding high!
For nought there was to look on 'twixt the pavement and the sky.
But the tie-beam lay on the dais, and methought its staining fair;
For rings of smoothest charcoal were round it here and there,
And the red flame flickered o'er it, and never a staining wight
Hath red earth in his coffer so clear and glittering bright,
And still the little smoke-wreaths curled o'er it pale and blue.
Yea, fair is our hall's adorning for a feast that is strange and new."

Said Arinbiorn: "What sawest thou therein, O Sweinbiorn, where sat thy grandsire at the feast? Where were the bones of thy mother lying?"

Said Sweinbiorn:

"We sought the feast-hall over, and nought we found therein
Of the bones of the ancient mothers, or the younglings of the kin.
The men are greedy, doubtless, to lose no whit of the prey,
And will try if the hoary elders may yet outlive the way

That leads to the southland cities, till at last they come to stand
With the younglings in the market to be sold in an alien land."

Arinbiorn's brow lightened somewhat; but ere he could speak again an ancient thrall of the Galtings spake and said:

"True it is, O warriors of the Bearings, that we might not see any war-thralls being led away by the Romans when they came away from the burning dwellings; and we deem it certain that they crossed the water before the coming of the Romans, and that they are now with the stay-at-homes of the Wolfings in the wild-wood behind the Wolfing dwellings, for we hear tell that the War-duke would not that the Hall-Sun should hold the Hall against the whole Roman host."

Then Sweinbiorn tossed up his sword into the air and caught it by the hilts as it fell, and cried out: "On, on to the meadow, where these thieves abide us!" Arinbiorn spake no word, but turned his horse and rode down to the ford, and all men followed him; and of the Bearings there were an hundred warriors save one, and of the Wormings eighty and seven.

So rode they over the meadow and into the ford and over it, and Otter's company stood on the bank to meet them, and shouted to see them; but the others made but little noise as they crossed the water.

So when they were on the western bank Arinbiorn came among them of Otter, and cried out: "Where then is Otter, where is the War-duke, is he alive or dead?"

And the throng opened to him and Otter stood facing him; and Arinbiorn spake and said: "Thou art alive and unhurt, War-duke, when many have been hurt and slain; and methinks thy company is little minished though the kindred of the Bearings lacketh a roof; and its elders and women and children are gone into captivity. What is this? Was it a light thing that gangrel thieves should burn and waste in Mid-mark and depart unhurt, that ye stand here with clean blades and cold bodies?"

Said Otter: "Thou grievest for the hurt of thine House, Arinbiorn; but this at least is good, that though ye have lost the timber of your house ye have not lost its flesh and blood; the shell is gone, but the kernel is saved: for thy folk are by this time in the wood with the Wolfing stay-at-homes, and among these are many who may fight on occasion, so they are safe as for this time: the Romans may not come at them to hurt them."

Said Arinbiorn: "Had ye time to learn all this, Otter, when ye fled so fast before the Romans, that the father tarried not for the son, nor the son for the father?"

He spoke in a loud voice so that many heard him, and some deemed it evil; for anger and dissension between friends seemed abroad; but some were so eager for battle, that the word of Arinbiorn seemed good to them, and they laughed for pride and anger.

Then Otter answered meekly, for he was a wise man and a bold: "We fled not, Arinbiorn, but as the sword fleeth, when it springeth up from the iron helm to fall on the woollen coat. Are we not now of more avail to you, O men of the Bearings, than our dead corpses would have been?"

Arinbiorn answered not, but his face waxed red, as if he were struggling with a weight hard to lift: then said Otter:

"But when will Thiodolf and the main battle be with us?"

Arinbiorn answered calmly: "Maybe in a little hour from now, or somewhat more."

Said Otter: "My rede is that we abide him here, and when we are all met and well ordered together, fall on the Romans at once: for then shall we be more than they; whereas now we are far fewer, and moreover we shall have to set on them in their ground of vantage."

Arinbiorn answered nothing; but an old man of the Bearings, one Thorbiorn, came up and spake:

"Warriors, here are we talking and taking counsel, though this is no Hallowed Thing to bid us what we shall do, and what we shall forbear; and to talk thus is less like warriors than old women wrangling over the why and wherefore of a broken crock. Let the War-duke rule here, as is but meet and right. Yet if I might speak and not break the peace of the Goths, then would I say this, that it might be better for us to fall on these Romans at once before they have cast up a dike about them, as Fox telleth is their wont, and that even in an hour they may do much."

As he spake there was a murmur of assent about him, but Otter spake sharply, for he was grieved.

"Thorbiorn, thou art old, and shouldest not be void of prudence. Now it had been better for thee to have been in the wood to-day to order the women and the swains according to thine ancient wisdom than to egg on my young warriors to fare unwarily. Here will I abide Thiodolf."

Then Thorbiorn reddened and was wroth; but Arinbiorn spake:

"What is this to-do? Let the War-duke rule as is but right: but I am now become a man of Thiodolf's company; and he bade me haste on before to help all I might. Do thou as thou wilt, Otter: for Thiodolf shall be here in an hour's space, and if much diking shall be done in an hour, yet little slaying, forsooth, shall be done, and that especially if the foe is all armed and slayeth women and children. Yea if the Bearing women be all slain, yet shall not Tyr make us new ones out of the stones of the waste to wed with the Galtings and the fish-eating Houses?—this is easy to be done forsooth. Yea, easier than fighting the Romans and overcoming them!"

And he was very wrath, and turned away; and again there was a murmur and a hum about him. But while these had been speaking aloud, Sweinbiorn had been talking softly to some of the younger men, and now he shook his naked sword in the air and spake aloud and sang:

"Ye tarry, Bears of Battle! ye linger, Sons of the Worm!
Ye crouch adown, O kindreds, from the gathering of the storm!
Ye say, it shall soon pass over and we shall fare afield
And reap the wheat with the war-sword and winnow in the shield.
But where shall be the corner wherein ye then shall abide,
And where shall be the woodland where the whelps of the bears shall hide
When 'twixt the snowy mountains and the edges of the sea
These men have swept the wild-wood and the fields where men may be
Of every living sword-blade, and every quivering spear,
And in the southland cities the yoke of slaves ye bear?
Lo ye! whoever follows I fare to sow the seed
Of the days to be hereafter and the deed that comes of deed."

Therewith he waved his sword over his head, and made as if he would spur onward. But Arinbiorn thrust through the press and outwent him and cried out:

"None goeth before Arinbiorn the Old when the battle is pitched in the meadows of the kindred. Come, ye sons of the Bear, ye children of the Worm! And come ye, whosoever hath a will to see stout men die!"

Then on he rode nor looked behind him, and the riders of the Bearings and the Wormings drew themselves out of the throng, and followed him, and rode clattering over the meadow towards Wolfstead. A few of the others rode with them, and yet but a few. For they remembered the holy Folk-mote and the oath of the War-duke, and how they had chosen Otter to be their leader. Howbeit, man looked askance at man, as if in shame to be left behind.

But Otter bethought him in the flash of a moment, "If these men ride alone, they shall die and do nothing; and if we ride with them it may be that we shall overthrow the Romans, and if we be vanquished, it shall go hard but we shall slay many of them, so that it shall be the easier for Thiodolf to deal with them."

Then he spake hastily, and bade certain men abide at the ford for a guard; then he drew his sword and rode to the front of his folk, and cried out aloud to them:

"Now at last has come the time to die, and let them of the Markmen who live hereafter lay us in howe. Set on, Sons of Tyr, and give not your lives away, but let them be dearly earned of our foemen."

Then all shouted loudly and gladly; nor were they otherwise than exceeding glad; for now had they forgotten all other joys of life save the joy of fighting for the kindred and the days to be.

So Otter led them forth, and when he heard the whole company clattering and thundering on the earth behind him and felt their might enter into him, his brow cleared, and the anxious lines in the face of the old man smoothed themselves out, and as he rode along the soul so stirred within him that he sang out aloud:

"Time was when hot was the summer and I was young on the earth,
And I grudged me every moment that lacked its share of mirth.
I woke in the morn and was merry and all the world methought
For me and my heart's deliverance that hour was newly wrought.
I have passed through the halls of manhood, I have reached the doors of eld,
And I have been glad and sorry, but ever have upheld
My heart against all trouble that none might call me sad,
But ne'er came such remembrance of how my heart was glad
In the afternoon of summer 'neath the still unwearyed sun

Of the days when I was little and all deeds were hopes to be won,
As now at last it cometh when e'en in such-like tide,
For the freeing of my trouble o'er the fathers' field I ride."

Many men perceived that he sang, and saw that he was merry, howbeit few heard his very words, and yet all were glad of him.

Fast they rode, being wishful to catch up with the Bearings and the Wormings, and soon they came anigh them, and they, hearing the thunder of the horse-hoofs, looked and saw that it was the company of Otter, and so slacked their speed till they were all joined together with joyous shouting and laughter. So then they ordered the ranks anew and so set forward in great joy without haste or turmoil toward Wolfstead and the Romans. For now the bitterness of their fury and the sourness of their abiding wrath were turned into the mere joy of battle; even as the clear red and sweet wine comes of the ugly ferment and rough trouble of the must.

CHAPTER XXIII—THIODOLF MEETETH THE ROMANS IN THE WOLFING MEADOW

It was scarce an hour after this that the footmen of Thiodolf came out of the thicket road on to the meadow of the Bearings; there saw they men gathered on a rising ground, and they came up to them and saw how some of them were looking with troubled faces towards the ford and what lay beyond it, and some toward the wood and the coming of Thiodolf. But these were they whom Otter had bidden abide Thiodolf there, and he had sent two messengers to them for Thiodolf's behoof that he might have due tidings so soon as he came out of the thicket: the first told how Otter had been compelled in a manner to fall on the Romans along with the riders of the Bearings and the Wormings, and the second who had but just then come, told how the Markmen had been worsted by the Romans, and had given back from the Wolfing dwellings, and were making a stand against the foemen in the meadow betwixt the ford and Wolfstead.

Now when Thiodolf heard of these tidings he stayed not to ask long questions, but led the whole host straightway down to the ford, lest the remnant of Otter's men should be driven down there, and the Romans should hold the western bank against him.

At the ford there was none to withstand them, nor indeed any man at all; for the men whom Otter had set there, when they heard that the battle had gone against their kindred, had ridden their ways to join them. So Thiodolf crossed over the ford, he and his in good order all afoot, he like to the others; but for him he was clad in the Dwarf-wrought Hauberk, but was unhelmeted and bare no shield. Throng-plough was naked in his hand as he came up all dripping on to the bank and stood in the meadow of the Wolfings; his face was stern and set as he gazed straight onward to the place of the fray, but he did not look as joyous as his wont was in going down to the battle.

Now they had gone but a short way from the ford before the noise of the fight and the blowing of horns came down the wind to them, but it was a little way further before they saw the fray with their eyes; because the ground fell away from the river somewhat at first, and then rose and fell again before it went up in one slope toward the Wolfing dwellings.

But when they were come to the top of the next swelling of the ground, they beheld from thence what they had to deal with; for there round about a ground of vantage was the field black with the Roman host, and in the midst of it was a tangle of struggling men and tossing spears, and glittering swords.

So when they beheld the battle of their kindred they gave a great shout and hastened onward the faster; and they were ordered into the wedge-array and Thiodolf led them, as meet it was. And now even as they who were on the outward edge of the array and could see what was toward were looking on the battle with eager eyes, there came an answering shout down the wind, which they knew for the voice of the Goths amid the foemen, and then they saw how the ring of the Romans shook and parted, and their array fell back, and lo the company of the Markmen standing stoutly together, though sorely minished; and sure it was that they had not fled or been scattered, but were ready to fall one over another in one band, for there were no men straggling towards the ford, though many masterless horses ran here and there about the meadow. Now, therefore, none doubted but that they would deliver their friends from the Romans, and overthrow the foemen.

But now befel a wonder, a strange thing to tell of. The Romans soon perceived what was adoing, whereupon the half of them turned about to face the new comers, while the other half

still withstood the company of Otter: the wedge-array of Thiodolf drew nearer and nearer till it was hard on the place where it should spread itself out to storm down on the foe, and the Goths beset by the Romans made them ready to fall on from their side. There was Thiodolf leading his host, and all men looking for the token and sign to fall on; but even as he lifted up Throng-plough to give that sign, a cloud came over his eyes and he saw nought of all that was before him, and he staggered back as one who hath gotten a deadly stroke, and so fell swooning to the earth, though none had smitten him. Then stayed was the wedge-array even at the very point of onset, and the hearts of the Goths sank, for they deemed that their leader was slain, and those who were nearest to him raised him up and bore him hastily aback out of the battle; and the Romans also had beheld him fall, and they also deemed him dead or sore hurt, and shouted for joy and loitered not, but stormed forth on the wedge-array like valiant men; for it must be told that they, who erst out-numbered the company of Otter, were now much out-numbered, but they deemed it might well be that they could dismay the Goths since they had been stayed by the fall of their leader; and Otter's company were wearied with sore fighting against a great host. Nevertheless these last, who had not seen the fall of Thiodolf (for the Romans were thick between him and them) fell on with such exceeding fury that they drove the Romans who faced them back on those who had set on the wedge-array, which also stood fast undismayed; for he who stood next to Thiodolf, a man big of body, and stout of heart, hight Thorolf, hove up a great axe and cried out aloud:

"Here is the next man to Thiodolf! here is one who will not fall till some one thrusts him over, here is Thorolf of the Wolfings! Stand fast and shield you, and smite, though Thiodolf be gone untimely to the Gods!"

So none gave back a foot, and fierce was the fight about the wedge-array; and the men of Otter—but there was no Otter there, and many another man was gone, and Arinbiorn the Old led them—these stormed on so fiercely that they cleft their way through all and joined themselves to their kindred, and the battle was renewed in the Wolfing meadow. But the Romans had this gain, that Thiodolf's men had let go their occasion for falling on the Romans with their line spread out so that every man might use his weapons; yet were the Goths strong both in valiancy and in numbers, nor might the Romans break into their array, and as aforesaid the Romans were the fewer, for it was less than half of their host that had pursued the Goths when they had been thrust back from their fierce onset: nor did more than the half seem needed, so many of them had fallen along with Otter the War-duke and Sweinbiorn of the Bearings, that they seemed to the Romans but a feeble band easy to overcome.

So fought they in the Wolfing meadow in the fifth hour after high-noon, and neither yielded to the other: but while these things were a-doing, men laid Thiodolf adown aloof from the battle under a doddered oak half a furlong from where the fight was a-doing, round whose bole clung flocks of wool from the sheep that drew around it in the hot summer-tide and rubbed themselves against it, and the ground was trodden bare of grass round the bole, and close to the trunk was worn into a kind of trench. There then they laid Thiodolf, and they wondered that no blood came from him, and that there was no sign of a shot-weapon in his body.

But as for him, when he fell, all memory of the battle and what had gone before it faded from his mind, and he passed into sweet and pleasant dreams wherein he was a lad again in the days before he had fought with the three Hun-Kings in the hazelled field. And in these dreams he was doing after the manner of young lads, sporting in the meadows, backing unbroken colts, swimming in the river, going a-hunting with the elder carles. And especially he deemed that he was in the company of one old man who had taught him both wood-craft and the handling of weapons: and fair at first was his dream of his doings with this man; he was with him in the forge smithying a sword-blade, and hammering into its steel the thin golden wires; and fishing with an angle along with him by the eddies of Mirkwood-water; and sitting with him in an angle of the Hall, the old man telling a tale of an ancient warrior of the Wolfings hight Thiodolf also: then suddenly and without going there, they were in a little clearing of the woods resting after hunting, a roe-deer with an arrow in her lying at their feet, and the old man was talking, and telling Thiodolf in what wise it was best to go about to get the wind of a hart; but all the while there was going on the thunder of a great gale of wind through the woodland boughs, even as the drone of a bag-pipe cleaves to the tune. Presently Thiodolf arose and would go about his hunting again, and stooped to take up his spear, and even therewith the old man's speech stayed, and Thiodolf looked up, and lo, his face was white like stone, and he touched him, and he was hard as flint, and like the image of

an ancient god as to his face and hands, though the wind stirred his hair and his raiment, as they did before. Therewith a great pang smote Thiodolf in his dream, and he felt as if he also were stiffening into stone, and he strove and struggled, and lo, the wild-wood was gone, and a white light empty of all vision was before him, and as he moved his head this became the Wolfing meadow, as he had known it so long, and thereat a soft pleasure and joy took hold of him, till again he looked, and saw there no longer the kine and sheep, and the herd-women tending them, but the rush and turmoil of that fierce battle, the confused thundering noise of which was going up to the heavens; for indeed he was now fully awake again.

So he stood up and looked about; and around him was a ring of the sorrowful faces of the warriors, who had deemed that he was hurt deadly, though no hurt could they find upon him. But the Dwarf-wrought Hauberk lay upon the ground beside him; for they had taken it off him to look for his hurts.

So he looked into their faces and said: "What aileth you, ye men? I am alive and unhurt; what hath betided?"

And one said: "Art thou verily alive, or a man come back from the dead? We saw thee fall as thou wentest leading us against the foe as if thou hadst been smitten by a thunder-bolt, and we deemed thee dead or grievously hurt. Now the carles are fighting stoutly, and all is well since thou livest yet."

So he said: "Give me the point and edges that I know, that I may smite myself therewith and not the foemen; for I have feared and blenched from the battle."

Said an old warrior: "If that be so, Thiodolf, wilt thou blench twice? Is not once enough? Now let us go back to the hard handplay, and if thou wilt, smite thyself after the battle, when we have once more had a man's help of thee."

Therewith he held out Throng-plough to him by the point, and Thiodolf took hold of the hilts and handled it and said: "Let us hasten, while the Gods will have it so, and while they are still suffering me to strike a stroke for the kindred."

And therewith he brandished Throng-plough, and went forth toward the battle, and the heart grew hot within him, and the joy of waking life came back to him, the joy which but erewhile he had given to a mere dream.

But the old man who had rebuked him stooped down and lifted the Hauberk from the ground, and cried out after him, "O Thiodolf, and wilt thou go naked into so strong a fight? and thou with this so goodly sword-rampart?"

Thiodolf stayed a moment, and even therewith they looked, and lo! the Romans giving back before the Goths and the Goths following up the chase, but slowly and steadily. Then Thiodolf heeded nothing save the battle, but ran forward hastily, and those warriors followed him, the old man last of all holding the Hauberk in his hand, and muttering:

"So fares hot blood to the glooming and the world beneath the grass;
And the fruit of the Wolfings' orchard in a flash from the world must pass.
Men say that the tree shall blossom in the garden of the folk,
And the new twig thrust him forward from the place where the old one broke,
And all be well as aforetime: but old and old I grow,
And I doubt me if such another the folk to come shall know."

And he still hurried forward as fast as his old body might go, so that he might wrap the safeguard of the Hauberk round Thiodolf's body.

CHAPTER XXIV—THE GOTHs ARE OVERTHROWN BY THE ROMANS

Now rose up a mighty shout when Thiodolf came back to the battle of the kindreds, for many thought he had been slain; and they gathered round about him, and cried out to him joyously out of their hearts of good-fellowship, and the old man who had rebuked Thiodolf, and who was Jorund of the Wolfings, came up to him and reached out to him the Hauberk, and he did it on scarce heeding; for all his heart and soul was turned toward the battle of the Romans and what they were a-doing; and he saw that they were falling back in good order, as men outnumbered, but undismayed. So he gathered all his men together and ordered them afresh; for they were somewhat disarrayed with the fray and the chase: and now he no longer ordered them in the wedge array, but in a line here three deep, here five deep, or more, for the foes were hard at hand, and outnumbered, and so far overcome, that he and all men deemed it a little matter to give these their last overthrow, and then onward to Wolf-stead to storm on what was left there and purge the house of the foemen. Howbeit Thiodolf bethought him

that succour might come to the Romans from their main-battle, as they needed not many men there, since there was nought to fear behind them: but the thought was dim within him, for once more since he had gotten the Hauberk on him the earth was wavering and dream-like: he looked about him, and nowise was he as in past days of battle when he saw nought but the foe before him, and hoped for nothing save the victory. But now indeed the Wood-Sun seemed to him to be beside him, and not against his will, as one besetting and hindering him, but as though his own longing had drawn her thither and would not let her depart; and whiles it seemed to him that her beauty was clearer to be seen than the bodies of the warriors round about him. For the rest he seemed to be in a dream indeed, and, as men do in dreams, to be for ever striving to be doing something of more moment than anything which he did, but which he must ever leave undone. And as the dream gathered and thickened about him the foe before him changed to his eyes, and seemed no longer the stern brown-skinned smooth-faced men under their crested iron helms with their iron-covered shields before them, but rather, big-headed men, small of stature, long-bearded, swart, crooked of body, exceeding foul of aspect. And he looked on and did nothing for a while, and his head whirled as though he had been grievously smitten.

Thus tarried the kindreds awhile, and they were bewildered and their hearts fell because Thiodolf did not fly on the foemen like a falcon on the quarry, as his wont was. But as for the Romans, they had now stayed, and were facing their foes again, and that on a vantage-ground, since the field sloped up toward the Wolfing dwelling; and they gathered heart when they saw that the Goths tarried and forbore them. But the sun was sinking, and the evening was hard at hand.

So at last Thiodolf led forward with Throng-plough held aloft in his right hand; but his left hand he held out by his side, as though he were leading someone along. And as he went, he muttered: "When will these accursed sons of the nether earth leave the way clear to us, that we may be alone and take pleasure each in each amidst of the flowers and the sun?"

Now as the two hosts drew near to one another, again came the sound of trumpets afar off, and men knew that this would be succour coming to the Romans from their main-battle, and the Romans thereon shouted for joy, and the host of the kindreds might no longer forbear, but rushed on fiercely against them; and for Thiodolf it was now come to this, that so entangled was he in his dream that he rather went with his men than led them. Yet had he Throng-plough in his right hand, and he muttered in his beard as he went, "Smite before! smite behind! and smite on the right hand! but never on the left!"

Thus then they met, and as before, neither might the Goths sweep the Romans away, nor the Romans break the Goths into flight; yet were many of the kindred anxious and troubled, since they knew that aid was coming to the Romans, and they heard the trumpets sounding nearer and more joyous; and at last, as the men of the kindreds were growing a-wearied with fighting, they heard those horns as it were in their very ears, and the thunder of the tramp of footmen, and they knew that a fresh host of men was upon them; then those they had been fighting with opened before them, falling aside to the right and the left, and the fresh men passing between them, fell on the Goths like the waters of a river when a sluice-gate is opened. They came on in very good order, never breaking their ranks, but swift withal, smiting and pushing before them, and so brake through the array of the Goth-folk, and drave them this way and that way down the slopes.

Yet still fought the warriors of the kindred most valiantly, making stand and facing the foe again and again in knots of a score or two score, or maybe ten score; and though many a man was slain, yet scarce any one before he had slain or hurt a Roman; and some there were, and they the oldest, who fought as if they and the few about them were all the host that was left to the folk, and heeded not that others were driven back, or that the Romans gathered about them, cutting them off from all succour and aid, but went on smiting till they were felled with many strokes.

Howbeit the array of the Goths was broken and many were slain, and perforce they must give back, and it seemed as if they would be driven into the river and all be lost.

But for Thiodolf, this befell him: that at first, when those fresh men fell on, he seemed, as it were, to wake unto himself again, and he cried aloud the cry of the Wolf, and thrust into the thickest of the fray, and slew many and was hurt of none, and for a moment of time there was an empty space round about him, such fear he cast even into the valiant hearts of the foemen. But those who had time to see him as they stood by him noted that he was as pale as

a dead man, and his eyes set and staring; and so of a sudden, while he stood thus threatening the ring of doubtful foemen, the weakness took him again, Throng-plough tumbled from his hand, and he fell to earth as one dead.

Then of those who saw him some deemed that he had been striving against some secret hurt till he could do no more; and some that there was a curse abroad that had fallen upon him and upon all the kindreds of the Mark; some thought him dead and some swooning. But, dead or alive, the warriors would not leave their War-duke among the foemen, so they lifted him, and gathered about him a goodly band that held its own against all comers, and fought through the turmoil stoutly and steadily; and others gathered to them, till they began to be something like a host again, and the Romans might not break them into knots of desperate men any more.

Thus they fought their way, Arinbiorn of the Bearings leading them now, with a mind to make a stand for life or death on some vantage-ground; and so, often turning upon the Romans, they came in array ever growing more solid to the rising ground looking one way over the ford and the other to the slopes where the battle had just been. There they faced the foe as men who may be slain, but will be driven no further; and what bowmen they had got spread out from their flanks and shot on the Romans, who had with them no light-armed, or slingers or bowmen, for they had left them at Wolf-stead. So the Romans stood a while, and gave breathing-space to the Markmen, which indeed was the saving of them: for if they had fallen on hotly and held to it steadily, it is like that they would have passed over all the bodies of the Markmen: for these had lost their leader, either slain, as some thought, or, as others thought, banned from leadership by the Gods; and their host was heavy-hearted; and though it is like that they would have stood there till each had fallen over other, yet was their hope grown dim, and the whole folk brought to a perilous and fearful pass, for if these were slain or scattered there were no more but they, and nought between fire and the sword and the people of the Mark.

But once again the faint-heart folly of the Roman Captain saved his foes: for whereas he once thought that the whole power of the Markmen lay in Otter and his company, and deemed them too little to meddle with, so now he ran his head into the other hedge, and deemed that Thiodolf's company was but a part of the succour that was at hand for the Goths, and that they were over-big for him to meddle with.

True it is also that now dark night was coming on, and the land was unknown to the Romans, who moreover trusted not wholly to the dastards of the Goths who were their guides and scouts: furthermore the wood was at hand, and they knew not what it held; and with all this and above it all, it is to be said that over them also had fallen a dread of some doom anear; for those habitations amidst of the wild-woods were terrible to them as they were dear to the Goths; and the Gods of their foemen seemed to be lying in wait to fall upon them, even if they should slay every man of the kindreds.

So now having driven back the Goths to that height over the ford, which indeed was no stronghold, no mountain, scarce a hill even, nought but a gentle swelling of the earth, they forebore them; and raising up the whoop of victory drew slowly aback, picking up their own dead and wounded, and slaying the wounded Markmen. They had with them also some few captives, but not many; for the fighting had been to the death between man and man on the Wolfing Meadow.

CHAPTER XXV—THE HOST OF THE MARKMEN COMETH INTO THE WILD-WOOD

Yet though the Romans were gone, the Goth-folk were very hard bested. They had been overthrown, not sorely maybe if they had been in an alien land, and free to come and go as they would; yet sorely as things were, because the foeman was sitting in their own House, and they must needs drag him out of it or perish: and to many the days seemed evil, and the Gods fighting against them, and both the Wolfings and the other kindreds bethought them of the Hall-Sun and her wisdom and longed to hear of tidings concerning her.

But now the word ran through the host that Thiodolf was certainly not slain. Slowly he had come to himself, and yet was not himself, for he sat among his men gloomy and silent, clean contrary to his wont; for hitherto he had been a merry man, and a joyous fellow.

Amidst of the ridge whereon the Markmen now abode, there was a ring made of the chief warriors and captains and wise men who had not been slain or grievously hurt in the fray, and

amidst them all sat Thiodolf on the ground, his chin sunken on his breast, looking more like a captive than the leader of a host amidst of his men; and that the more as his scabbard was empty; for when Throng-plough had fallen from his hand, it had been trodden under foot, and lost in the turmoil. There he sat, and the others in that ring of men looked sadly upon him; such as Arinbiorn of the Bearings, and Wolfkettle and Thorolf of his own House, and Hiarandi of the Elkings, and Geirbald the Shielding, the messenger of the woods, and Fox who had seen the Roman Garth, and many others. It was night now, and men had lighted fires about the host, for they said that the Romans knew where to find them if they listed to seek; and about those fires were men eating and drinking what they might come at, but amidmost of that ring was the biggest fire, and men turned them towards it for counsel and help, for elsewhere none said, "What do we?" for they were heavy-hearted and redeless, since the Gods had taken the victory out of their hands just when they seemed at point to win it.

But amidst all this there was a little stir outside that biggest ring, and men parted, and through them came a swain amongst the chiefs, and said, "Who will lead me to the War-duke?"

Thiodolf, who was close beside the lad, answered never a word; but Arinbiorn said; "This man here sitting is the War-duke: speak to him, for he may hearken to thee: but first who art thou?"

Said the lad; "My name is Ali the son of Grey, and I come with a message from the Hall-Sun and the stay-at-homes who are in the Woodland."

Now when he named the Hall-Sun Thiodolf started and looked up, and turning to his left-hand said, "And what sayeth thy daughter?"

Men did not heed that he said *thy* daughter, but deemed that he said *my* daughter, since he was wont as her would-be foster-father to call her so. But Ali spake:

"War-duke and ye chieftains, thus saith the Hall-Sun: 'I know that by this time Otter hath been slain and many another, and ye have been overthrown and chased by the Romans, and that now there is little counsel in you except to abide the foe where ye are and there to die valiantly. But now do my bidding and as I am bidden, and then whosoever dieth or liveth, the kindreds shall vanquish that they may live and grow greater. Do ye thus: the Romans think no otherwise but to find you here to-morrow or else departed across the water as broken men, and they will fall upon you with their whole host, and then make a war-garth after their manner at Wolf-stead and carry fire and the sword and the chains of thralldom into every House of the Mark. Now therefore fetch a compass and come into the wood on the north-west of the houses and make your way to the Thing-stead of the Mid-mark. For who knoweth but that to-morrow we may fall upon these thieves again? Of this shall ye hear more when we may speak together and take counsel face to face; for we stay-at-homes know somewhat closely of the ways of these Romans. Haste then! let not the grass grow over your feet!

"But to thee, Thiodolf, have I a word to say when we meet; for I wot that as now thou canst not hearken to my word.' Thus saith the Hall-Sun."

"Wilt thou speak, War-duke?" said Arinbiorn. But Thiodolf shook his head. Then said Arinbiorn; "Shall I speak for thee?" and Thiodolf nodded yea. Then said Arinbiorn: "Ali son of Grey, art thou going back to her that sent thee?"

"Yea," said the lad, "but in your company, for ye will be coming straightway and I know all the ways closely; and there is need for a guide through the dark night as ye will see presently."

Then stood up Arinbiorn and said: "Chiefs and captains, go ye speedily and array your men for departure: bid them leave all the fires burning and come their ways as silently as maybe; for now will we wend this same hour before moonrise into the Wild-wood and the Thing-stead of Mid-mark; thus saith the War-duke."

But when they were gone, and Arinbiorn and Thiodolf were left alone, Thiodolf lifted up his head and spake slowly and painfully:

"Arinbiorn, I thank thee: and thou dost well to lead this folk: since as for me that is somewhat that weighs me down, and I know not whether it be life or death; therefore I may no longer be your captain, for twice now have I blenched from the battle. Yet command me, and I will obey, set a sword in my hand and I will smite, till the God snatches it out of my hand, as he did Throng-plough to-day."

"And that is well," said Arinbiorn, "it may be that ye shall meet that God to-morrow, and heave up sword against him, and either overcome him or go to thy fathers a proud and valiant

man.”

So they spake, and Thiodolf stood up and seemed of better cheer. But presently the whole host was afoot, and they went their ways warily with little noise, and wound little by little about the Wolfing meadow and about the acres towards the wood at the back of the Houses; and they met nothing by the way except an out-guard of the Romans, whom they slew there nigh silently, and bore away their bodies, twelve in number, lest the Romans when they sent to change the guard, should find the slain and have an inkling of the way the Goths were gone; but now they deemed that the Romans might think their guard fled, or perchance that they had been carried away by the Gods of the woodland folk.

So came they into the wood, and Arinbiorn and the chiefs were for striking the All-men’s road to the Thing-stead and so coming thither; but the lad Ali when he heard it laughed and said:

“If ye would sleep to-night ye shall wend another way. For the Hall-Sun hath had us at work cumbering it against the foe with great trees felled with limbs, branches, and all. And indeed ye shall find the Thing-stead fenced like a castle, and the in-gate hard to find; yet will I bring you thither.”

So did he without delay, and presently they came anigh the Thing-stead; and the place was fenced cunningly, so that if men would enter they must go by a narrow way that had a fence of tree-trunks on each side wending inward like the maze in a pleasance. Thereby now wended the host all afoot, since it was a holy place and no beast must set foot therein, so that the horses were left without it: so slowly and right quietly once more they came into the garth of the Thing-stead; and lo, a many folk there, of the Wolfings and the Bearings and other kindreds, who had gathered thereto; and albeit these were not warriors in their prime, yet were there none save the young children and the weaker of the women but had weapons of some kind; and they were well ordered, standing or sitting in ranks like folk awaiting battle. There were booths of boughs and rushes set up for shelter of the feebler women and the old men and children along the edges of the fence, for the Hall-Sun had bidden them keep the space clear round about the Doom-ring and the Hill-of-Speech as if for a mighty folk-mote, so that the warriors might have room to muster there and order their array. There were some cooking-fires lighted about the aforesaid booths, but neither many nor great, and they were screened with wattle from the side that lay toward the Romans; for the Hall-Sun would not that they should hold up lanterns for their foemen to find them by. Little noise there was in that stronghold, moreover, for the hearts of all who knew their right hands from their left were set on battle and the destruction of the foe that would destroy the kindreds.

Anigh the Speech-Hill, on its eastern side, had the bole of a slender beech tree been set up, and at the top of it a cross-beam was nailed on, and therefrom hung the wondrous lamp, the Hall-Sun, glimmering from on high, and though its light was but a glimmer amongst the mighty wood, yet was it also screened on three sides from the sight of the chance wanderer by wings of thin plank. But beneath her namesake as beforetime in the Hall sat the Hall-Sun, the maiden, on a heap of faggots, and she was wrapped in a dark blue cloak from under which gleamed the folds of the fair golden-broidered gown she was wont to wear at folk-motes, and her right hand rested on a naked sword that lay across her knees: beside her sat the old man Sorli, the Wise in War, and about her were slim lads and sturdy maidens and old carles of the thralls or freedmen ready to bear the commands that came from her mouth; for she and Sorli were the captains of the stay-at-homes.

Now came Thiodolf and Arinbiorn and other leaders into the ring of men before her, and she greeted them kindly and said:

“Hail, Sons of Tyr! now that I behold you again it seemeth to me as if all were already won: the time of waiting hath been weary, and we have borne the burden of fear every day from morn till even, and in the waking hour we presently remembered it. But now ye are come, even if this Thing-stead were lighted by the flames of the Wolfing Roof instead of by these moonbeams; even if we had to begin again and seek new dwellings, and another water and other meadows, yet great should grow the kindreds of the Men who have dwelt in the Mark, and nought should overshadow them: and though the beasts and the Romans were dwelling in their old places, yet should these kindreds make new clearings in the Wild-wood; and they with their deeds should cause other waters to be famous, that as yet have known no deeds of man; and they should compel the Earth to bear increase round about their dwelling-places for the welfare of the kindreds. O Sons of Tyr, friendly are your faces, and undismayed, and

the Terror of the Nations has not made you afraid any more than would the onrush of the bisons that feed adown the grass hills. Happy is the eve, O children of the Goths, yet shall to-morrow morn be happier."

Many heard what she spake, and a murmur of joy ran through the ranks of men: for they deemed her words to forecast victory.

And now amidst her speaking, the moon, which had arisen on Mid-mark, when the host first entered into the wood, had overtopped the tall trees that stood like a green wall round about the Thing-stead, and shone down on that assembly, and flashed coldly back from the arms of the warriors. And the Hall-Sun cast off her dark blue cloak and stood up in her golden-broidered raiment, which flashed back the grey light like as it had been an icicle hanging from the roof of some hall in the midnight of Yule, when the feast is high within, and without the world is silent with the night of the ten-weeks' frost.

Then she spake again: "O War-duke, thy mouth is silent; speak to this warrior of the Bearings that he bid the host what to do; for wise are ye both, and dear are the minutes of this night and should not be wasted; since they bring about the salvation of the Wolfings, and the vengeance of the Bearings, and the hope renewed of all the kindreds."

Then Thiodolf abode a while with his head down cast; his bosom heaved, and he set his left hand to his swordless scabbard, and his right to his throat, as though he were sore troubled with something he might not tell of: but at last he lifted up his head and spoke to Arinbiorn, but slowly and painfully, as he had spoken before:

"Chief of the Bearings, go up on to the Hill of Speech, and speak to the folk out of thy wisdom, and let them know that to-morrow early before the sun-rising those that may, and are not bound by the Gods against it, shall do deeds according to their might, and win rest for themselves, and new days of deeds for the kindreds."

Therewith he ceased, and let his head fall again, and the Hall-Sun looked at him askance. But Arinbiorn clomb the Speech-Hill and said:

"Men of the kindreds, it is now a few days since we first met the Romans and fought with them; and whiles we have had the better, and whiles the worse in our dealings, as oft in war befalleth: for they are men, and we no less than men. But now look to it what ye will do; for we may no longer endure these outlanders in our houses, and we must either die or get our own again: and that is not merely a few wares stored up for use, nor a few head of neat, nor certain timbers piled up into a dwelling, but the life we have made in the land we have made. I show you no choice, for no choice there is. Here are we bare of everything in the wild-wood: for the most part our children are crying for us at home, our wives are longing for us in our houses, and if we come not to them in kindness, the Romans shall come to them in grimness. Down yonder in the plain, moreover, is our wain-burg slowly drawing near to us, and with it is much livelihood of ours, which is a little thing, for we may get more; but also there are our banners of battle and the tokens of the kindred, which is a great thing. And between all this and us there lieth but little; nought but a band of valiant men, and a few swords and spears, and a few wounds, and the hope of death amidst the praise of the people; and this ye have to set out to wend across within two or three hours. I will not ask if ye will do so, for I wot that even so ye will; therefore when I have done, shout not, nor clash sword on shield, for we are no great way off that house of ours wherein dwells the foe that would destroy us. Let each man rest as he may, and sleep if he may with his war-gear on him and his weapons by his side, and when he is next awakened by the captains and the leaders of hundreds and scores, let him not think that it is night, but let him betake himself to his place among his kindred and be ready to go through the wood with as little noise as may be. Now all is said that the War-duke would have me say, and to-morrow shall those see him who are foremost in falling upon the foemen, for he longeth sorely for his seat on the days of the Wolfing Hall."

So he spake, and even as he bade them, they made no sound save a joyous murmur; and straightway the more part of them betook themselves to sleep as men who must busy themselves about a weighty matter; for they were wise in the ways of war. So sank all the host to the ground save those who were appointed as watchers of the night, and Arinbiorn and Thiodolf and the Hall-Sun; they three yet stood together; and Arinbiorn said:

"Now it seems to me not so much as if we had vanquished the foe and were safe and at rest, but rather as if we had no foemen and never have had. Deep peace is on me, though hitherto I have been deemed a wrathful man, and it is to me as if the kindreds that I love had filled the

whole earth, and left no room for foemen: even so it may really be one day. To-night it is well, yet to-morrow it shall be better. What thine errand may be, Thiodolf, I scarce know; for something hath changed in thee, and thou art become strange to us. But as for mine errand, I will tell it thee; it is that I am seeking Otter of the Laxings, my friend and fellow, whose wisdom my foolishness drove under the point and edge of the Romans, so that he is no longer here; I am seeking him, and to-morrow I think I shall find him, for he hath not had time to travel far, and we shall be blithe and merry together. And now will I sleep; for I have bidden the watchers awaken me if any need be. Sleep thou also, Thiodolf! and wake up thine old self when the moon is low." Therewith he laid himself down under the lee of the pile of faggots, and was presently asleep.

CHAPTER XXVI—THIODOLF TALKETH WITH THE WOOD-SUN

Now were Thiodolf and the Hall-Sun left alone together standing by the Speech-Hill; and the moon was risen high in the heavens above the tree-tops of the wild-wood. Thiodolf scarce stirred, and he still held his head bent down as one lost in thought.

Then said the Hall-Sun, speaking softly amidst the hush of the camp:

"I have said that the minutes of this night are dear, and they are passing swiftly; and it may be that thou wilt have much to say and to do before the host is astir with the dawning. So come thou with me a little way, that thou mayst hear of new tidings, and think what were best to do amidst them."

And without more ado she took him by the hand and led him forth, and he went as he was led, not saying a word. They passed out of the camp into the wood, none hindering, and went a long way where under the beech-leaves there was but a glimmer of the moonlight, and presently Thiodolf's feet went as it were of themselves; for they had hit a path that he knew well and over-well.

So came they to that little wood-lawn where first in this tale Thiodolf met the Wood-Sun; and the stone seat there was not empty now any more than it was then; for thereon sat the Wood-Sun, clad once more in her glittering raiment. Her head was sunken down, her face hidden by her hands; neither did she look up when she heard their feet on the grass, for she knew who they were.

Thiodolf lingered not; for a moment it was to him as if all that past time had never been, and its battles and hurry and hopes and fears but mere shows, and the unspoken words of a dream. He went straight up to her and sat down by her side and put his arm about her shoulders, and strove to take her hand to caress it; but she moved but little, and it was as if she heeded him not. And the Hall-Sun stood before them and looked at them for a little while; and then she fell to speech; but at the first sound of her voice, it seemed that the Wood-Sun trembled, but still she hid her face. Said the Hall-Sun:

"Two griefs I see before me in mighty hearts grown great;
And to change both these into gladness out-goes the power of fate.
Yet I, a lonely maiden, have might to vanquish one
Till it melt as the mist of the morning before the summer sun.
O Wood-Sun, thou hast borne me, and I were fain indeed
To give thee back thy gladness; but thou com'st of the Godhead's seed,
And herein my might avails not; because I can but show
Unto these wedded sorrows the truth that the heart should know
Ere the will hath wielded the hand; and for thee, I can tell thee nought
That thou hast not known this long while; thy will and thine hand have wrought,
And the man that thou lovest shall live in despite of Gods and of men,
If yet thy will endureth. But what shall it profit thee then
That after the fashion of Godhead thou hast gotten thee a thrall
To be thine and never another's, whatso in the world may befall?
Lo! yesterday this was a man, and to-morrow it might have been
The very joy of the people, though never again it were seen;
Yet a part of all they hoped for through all the lapse of years,
To make their laughter happy and dull the sting of tears;
To quicken all remembrance of deeds that never die,
And death that maketh eager to live as the days go by.
Yea, many a deed had he done as he lay in the dark of the mound;
As the seed-wheat plotteth of spring, laid under the face of the ground
That the foot of the husbandman treadeth, that the wind of the winter wears,
That the turbid cold flood hideth from the constant hope of the years.
This man that should leave in his death his life unto many an one
Wilt thou make him a God of the fearful who live lone under the sun?
And then shalt thou have what thou wouldst when amidst of the hazelled field
Thou kissed'st the mouth of the helper, and the hand of the people's shield,
Shalt thou have the thing that thou wouldst when thou broughtest me to birth,

And I, the soul of the Wolfings, began to look on earth?
 Wilt thou play the God, O mother, and make a man anew,
 A joyless thing and a fearful? Then I betwixt you two,
 'Twixt your longing and your sorrow will cast the sundering word,
 And tell out all the story of that rampart of the sword!
 I shall bid my mighty father make choice of death in life,
 Or life in death victorious and the crownèd end of strife."

Ere she had ended, the Wood-Sun let her hands fall down, and showed her face, which for all its unpaled beauty looked wearied and anxious; and she took Thiodolf's hand in hers, while she looked with eyes of love upon the Hall-Sun, and Thiodolf laid his cheek to her cheek, and though he smiled not, yet he seemed as one who is happy. At last the Wood-Sun spoke and said:

"Thou sayest sooth, O daughter: I am no God of might,
 Yet I am of their race, and I think with their thoughts and see with their sight,
 And the threat of the doom did I know of, and yet spared not to lie:
 For I thought that the fate foreboded might touch and pass us by,
 As the sword that heweth the war-helm and cleaveth a cante away,
 And the cunning smith shall mend it and it goeth again to the fray:
 If my hand might have held for a moment, yea, even against his will,
 The life of my beloved! But Weird is the master still:
 And this man's love of my body and his love of the ancient kin
 Were matters o'er mighty to deal with and the game withal to win.
 Woe's me for the waning of all things, and my hope that needs must fade
 As the fruitless sun of summer on the waste where nought is made!
 And now farewell, O daughter, thou mayst not see the kiss
 Of the hapless and the death-doomed when I have told of this;
 Yet once again shalt thou see him, though I no more again,
 Fair with the joy that hopeth and dieth not in vain."

Then came the Hall-Sun close to her, and knelt down by her, and laid her head upon her knees and wept for love of her mother, who kissed her oft and caressed her; and Thiodolf's hand strayed, as it were, on to his daughter's head, and he looked kindly on her, though scarce now as if he knew her. Then she arose when she had kissed her mother once more, and went her ways from that wood-lawn into the woods again, and so to the Folk-mote of her people.

But when those twain were all alone again, the Wood-Sun spoke: "O Thiodolf canst thou hear me and understand?"

"Yea," he said, "when thou speakest of certain matters, as of our love together, and of our daughter that came of our love."

"Thiodolf," she said, "How long shall our love last?"

"As long as our life," he said.

"And if thou diest to-day, where then shall our love be?" said the Wood-Sun.

He said, "I must now say, I wot not; though time was I had said, It shall abide with the soul of the Wolfing Kindred."

She said: "And when that soul dieth, and the kindred is no more?"

"Time ago," quoth he, "I had said, it shall abide with the Kindreds of the Earth; but now again I say, I wot not."

"Will the Earth hide it," said she, "when thou diest and art borne to mound?"

"Even so didst thou say when we spake together that other night," said he; "and now I may say nought against thy word."

"Art thou happy, O Folk-Wolf?" she said.

"Why dost thou ask me?" said he; "I know not; we were sundered and I longed for thee; thou art here; it is enough."

"And the people of thy Kindred?" she said, "dost thou not long for them?"

He said; "Didst thou not say that I was not of them? Yet were they my friends, and needed me, and I loved them: but by this evening they will need me no more, or but little; for they will be victorious over their foes: so hath the Hall-Sun foretold. What then! shall I take all from thee to give little to them?"

"Thou art wise," she said; "Wilt thou go to battle to-day?"

"So it seemeth," said he.

She said: "And wilt thou bear the Dwarf-wrought Hauberk? for if thou dost, thou wilt live, and if thou dost not, thou wilt die."

"I will bear it," said he, "that I may live to love thee."

"Thinkest thou that any evil goes with it?" said she.

There came into his face a flash of his ancient boldness as he answered: "So it seemed to me yesterday, when I fought clad in it the first time; and I fell unsmitten on the meadow, and was shamed, and would have slain myself but for thee. And yet it is not so that any evil goes with it; for thou thyself didst say that past night that there was no evil weird in it."

She said: "How then if I lied that night?"

Said he; "It is the wont of the Gods to lie, and be unashamed, and men-folk must bear with it."

"Ah! how wise thou art!" she said; and was silent for a while, and drew away from him a little, and clasped her hands together and wrung them for grief and anger. Then she grew calm again, and said:

"Wouldest thou die at my bidding?"

"Yea," said he, "not because thou art of the Gods, but because thou hast become a woman to me, and I love thee."

Then was she silent some while, and at last she said, "Thiodolf, wilt thou do off the Hauberk if I bid thee?"

"Yea, yea," said he, "and let us depart from the Wolfings, and their strife, for they need us not."

She was silent once more for a longer while still, and at last she said in a cold voice; "Thiodolf, I bid thee arise, and put off the Hauberk from thee."

He looked at her wondering, not at her words, but at the voice wherewith she spake them; but he arose from the stone nevertheless, and stood stark in the moonlight; he set his hand to the collar of the war-coat, and undid its clasps, which were of gold and blue stones, and presently he did the coat from off him and let it slide to the ground where it lay in a little grey heap that looked but a handful. Then he sat down on the stone again, and took her hand and kissed her and caressed her fondly, and she him again, and they spake no word for a while: but at the last he spake in measure and rhyme in a low voice, but so sweet and clear that it might have been heard far in the hush of the last hour of the night:

"Dear now are this dawn-dusk's moments as is the last of the light
When the foemen's ranks are wavering, and the victory feareth night;
And of all the time I have loved thee of these am I most fain,
When I know not what shall betide me, nor what shall be my gain.
But dear as they are, they are waning, and at last the time is come
When no more shall I behold thee till I wend to Odin's Home.
Now is the time so little that once hath been so long
That I fain would ask thee pardon wherein I have done thee wrong,
That thy longing might be softer, and thy love more sweet to have.
But in nothing have I wronged thee, there is nought that I may crave.
Strange too! as the minutes fail me, so do my speech-words fail,
Yet strong is the joy within me for this hour that crowns the tale."

Therewith he clipped her and caressed her, and she spake nothing for a while; and he said; "Thy face is fair and bright; art thou not joyous of these minutes?"

She said: "Thy words are sweet; but they pierce my heart like a sharp knife; for they tell me of thy death and the ending of our love."

Said he; "I tell thee nothing, beloved, that thou hast not known: is it not for this that we have met here once more?"

She answered after a while; "Yea, yea; yet mightest thou have lived."

He laughed, but not scornfully or bitterly and said:

"So thought I in time past: but hearken, beloved; If I fall to-day, shall there not yet be a minute after the stroke hath fallen on me, wherein I shall know that the day is won and see the foemen fleeing, and wherein I shall once again deem I shall never die, whatever may betide afterwards, and though the sword lieth deep in my breast? And shall I not see then and know that our love hath no end?"

Bitter grief was in her face as she heard him. But she spake and said: "Lo here the Hauberk which thou hast done off thee, that thy breast might be the nearer to mine! Wilt thou not wear it in the fight for my sake?"

He knit his brows somewhat, and said:

"Nay, it may not be: true it is that thou saidest that no evil weird went with it, but hearken! Yesterday I bore it in the fight, and ere I mingled with the foe, before I might give the

token of onset, a cloud came before my eyes and thick darkness wrapped me around, and I fell to the earth unsmitten; and so was I borne out of the fight, and evil dreams beset me of evil things, and the dwarfs that hate mankind. Then I came to myself, and the Hauberk was off me, and I rose up and beheld the battle, that the kindreds were pressing on the foe, and I thought not then of any past time, but of the minutes that were passing; and I ran into the fight straightway: but one followed me with that Hauberk, and I did it on, thinking of nought but the battle. Fierce then was the fray, yet I faltered in it; till the fresh men of the Romans came in upon us and broke up our array. Then my heart almost broke within me, and I faltered no more, but rushed on as of old, and smote great strokes all round about: no hurt I got, but once more came that ugly mist over my eyes, and again I fell unsmitten, and they bore me out of battle: then the men of our folk gave back and were overcome; and when I awoke from my evil dreams, we had gotten away from the fight and the Wolfing dwellings, and were on the mounds above the ford cowering down like beaten men. There then I sat shamed among the men who had chosen me for their best man at the Holy Thing, and lo I was their worst! Then befell that which never till then had befallen me, that life seemed empty and worthless and I longed to die and be done with it, and but for the thought of thy love I had slain myself then and there.

"Thereafter I went with the host to the assembly of the stay-at-homes and fleers, and sat before the Hall-Sun our daughter, and said the words which were put into my mouth. But now must I tell thee a hard and evil thing; that I loved them not, and was not of them, and outside myself there was nothing: within me was the world and nought without me. Nay, as for thee, I was not sundered from thee, but thou wert a part of me; whereas for the others, yea, even for our daughter, thine and mine, they were but images and shows of men, and I longed to depart from them, and to see thy body and to feel thine heart beating. And by then so evil was I grown that my very shame had fallen from me, and my will to die: nay, I longed to live, thou and I, and death seemed hateful to me, and the deeds before death vain and foolish.

"Where then was my glory and my happy life, and the hope of the days fresh born every day, though never dying? Where then was life, and Thiodolf that once had lived?

"But now all is changed once more; I loved thee never so well as now, and great is my grief that we must sunder, and the pain of farewell wrings my heart. Yet since I am once more Thiodolf the Mighty, in my heart there is room for joy also. Look at me, O Wood-Sun, look at me, O beloved! tell me, am I not fair with the fairness of the warrior and the helper of the folk? Is not my voice kind, do not my lips smile, and mine eyes shine? See how steady is mine hand, the friend of the folk! For mine eyes are cleared again, and I can see the kindreds as they are, and their desire of life and scorn of death, and this is what they have made me myself. Now therefore shall they and I together earn the merry days to come, the winter hunting and the spring sowing, the summer haysel, the ingathering of harvest, the happy rest of midwinter, and Yuletide with the memory of the Fathers, wedded to the hope of the days to be. Well may they bid me help them who have holpen me! Well may they bid me die who have made me live!

"For whereas thou sayest that I am not of their blood, nor of their adoption, once more I heed it not. For I have lived with them, and eaten and drunken with them, and toiled with them, and led them in battle and the place of wounds and slaughter; they are mine and I am theirs; and through them am I of the whole earth, and all the kindreds of it; yea, even of the foemen, whom this day the edges in mine hand shall smite.

"Therefore I will bear the Hauberk no more in battle; and belike my body but once more: so shall I have lived and death shall not have undone me.

"Lo thou, is not this the Thiodolf whom thou hast loved? no changeling of the Gods, but the man in whom men have trusted, the friend of Earth, the giver of life, the vanquisher of death?"

And he cast himself upon her, and strained her to his bosom and kissed her, and caressed her, and awoke the bitter-sweet joy within her, as he cried out:

"O remember this, and this, when at last I am gone from thee!"

But when they sundered her face was bright, but the tears were on it, and she said: "O Thiodolf, thou wert fain hadst thou done a wrong to me so that I might forgive thee; now wilt thou forgive me the wrong I have done thee?"

"Yea," he said, "Even so would I do, were we both to live, and how much more if this be the dawn of our sundering day! What hast thou done?"

She said: "I lied to thee concerning the Hauberk when I said that no evil weird went with it: and this I did for the saving of thy life."

He laid his hand fondly on her head, and spake smiling: "Such is the wont of the God-kin, because they know not the hearts of men. Tell me all the truth of it now at last."

She said:

"Hear then the tale of the Hauberk and the truth there is to tell:
There was a maid of the God-kin, and she loved a man right well,
Who unto the battle was wending; and she of her wisdom knew
That thence to the folk-hall threshold should come back but a very few;
And she feared for her love, for she doubted that of these he should not be;
So she wended the wilds lamenting, as I have lamented for thee;
And many wise she pondered, how to bring her will to pass
(E'en as I for thee have pondered), as her feet led over the grass,
Till she lifted her eyes in the wild-wood, and lo! she stood before
The Hall of the Hollow-places; and the Dwarf-lord stood in the door
And held in his hand the Hauberk, whereon the hammer's blow
The last of all had been smitten, and the sword should be hammer now.
Then the Dwarf beheld her fairness, and the wild-wood many-leaved
Before his eyes was reeling at the hope his heart conceived;
So sorely he longed for her body; and he laughed before her and cried,
'O Lady of the Disir, thou farrest wandering wide
Lamenting thy beloved and the folk-mote of the spear,
But if amidst of the battle this child of the hammer he bear
He shall laugh at the foemen's edges and come back to thy lily breast
And of all the days of his life-time shall his coming years be best.'
Then she bowed adown her godhead and sore for the Hauberk she prayed;
But his greedy eyes devoured her as he stood in the door and said;
'Come lie in mine arms! Come hither, and we twain the night to wake!
And then as a gift of the morning the Hauberk shall ye take.'
So she humbled herself before him, and entered into the cave,
The dusky, the deep-gleaming, the gem-strewn golden grave.
But he saw not her girdle loosened, or her bosom gleam on his love,
For she set the sleep-thorn in him, that he saw, but might not move,
Though the bitter salt tears burned him for the anguish of his greed;
And she took the hammer's offspring, her unearned morning meed,
And went her ways from the rock-hall and was glad for her warrior's sake.
But behind her dull speech followed, and the voice of the hollow spake:
'Thou hast left me bound in anguish, and hast gained thine heart's desire;
Now I would that the dewy night-grass might be to thy feet as the fire,
And shrivel thy raiment about thee, and leave thee bare to the flame,
And no way but a fiery furnace for the road whereby ye came!
But since the folk of God-home we may not slay nor smite,
And that fool of the folk that thou lovest, thou hast saved in my despite,
Take with thee, thief of God-home, this other word I say:
Since the safeguard wrought in the ring-mail I may not do away
I lay this curse upon it, that whoso weareth the same,
Shall save his life in the battle, and have the battle's shame;
He shall live through wrack and ruin, and ever have the worse,
And drag adown his kindred, and bear the people's curse.'
'Lo, this the tale of the Hauberk, and I knew it for the truth:
And little I thought of the kindreds; of their day I had no ruth;
For I said, They are doomed to departure; in a little while must they wane,
And nought it helpeth or hindreth if I hold my hand or refrain.
Yea, thou wert become the kindred, both thine and mine; and thy birth
To me was the roofing of heaven, and the building up of earth.
I have loved, and I must sorrow; thou hast lived, and thou must die;
Ah, wherefore were there others in the world than thou and I?"

He turned round to her and clasped her strongly in his arms again, and kissed her many times and said:

"Lo, here art thou forgiven; and here I say farewell!
Here the token of my wonder which my words may never tell;
The wonder past all thinking, that my love and thine should blend;
That thus our lives should mingle, and sunder in the end!
Lo, this, for the last remembrance of the mighty man I was,
Of thy love and thy forbearing, and all that came to pass!
Night wanes, and heaven dights her for the kiss of sun and earth;
Look up, look last upon me on this morn of the kindreds' mirth!"

Therewith he arose and lingered no minute longer, but departed, going as straight towards the Thing-stead and the Folk-mote of his kindred as the swallow goes to her nest in the hall-porch. He looked not once behind him, though a bitter wailing rang through the woods and filled his heart with the bitterness of her woe and the anguish of the hour of sundering.

CHAPTER XXVII—THEY WEND TO THE MORNING BATTLE

Now when Thiodolf came back to the camp the signs of dawn were plain in the sky, the moon was low and sinking behind the trees, and he saw at once that the men were stirring and getting ready for departure. He looked gladly and blithely at the men he fell in with, and they at him, and scarce could they refrain a shout when they beheld his face and the brightness of it. He went straight up to where the Hall-Sun was yet sitting under her namesake, with Arinbiorn standing before her amidst of a ring of leaders of hundreds and scores: but old Sorli sat by her side clad in all his war-gear.

When Thiodolf first came into that ring of men they looked doubtfully at him, as if they dreaded somewhat, but when they had well beheld him their faces cleared, and they became joyous.

He went straight up to Arinbiorn and kissed the old warrior, and said to him, "I give thee good morrow, O leader of the Bearings! Here now is come the War-duke! and meseems that we should get to work as speedily as may be, for lo the dawning!"

"Hail to thine hand, War-duke!" said Arinbiorn joyously; "there is no more to do but to take thy word concerning the order wherein we shall wend; for all men are armed and ready."

Said Thiodolf; "Lo ye, I lack war-gear and weapons! Is there a good sword hereby, a helm, a byrny and a shield? For hard will be the battle, and we must fence ourselves all we may."

"Hard by," said Arinbiorn, "is the war-gear of Ivar of our House, who is dead in the night of his hurts gotten in yesterday's battle: thou and he are alike in stature, and with a good will doth he give them to thee, and they are goodly things, for he comes of smithying blood. Yet is it a pity of Throng-plough that he lieth on the field of the slain."

But Thiodolf smiled and said: "Nay, Ivar's blade shall serve my turn to-day; and thereafter shall it be seen to, for then will be time for many things."

So they went to fetch him the weapons; but he said to Arinbiorn, "Hast thou numbered the host? What are the gleanings of the Roman sword?"

Said Arinbiorn: "Here have we more than three thousand three hundred warriors of the host fit for battle: and besides this here are gathered eighteen hundred of the Wolfings and the Bearings, and of the other Houses, mostly from over the water, and of these nigh upon seven hundred may bear sword or shoot shaft; neither shall ye hinder them from so doing if the battle be joined."

Then said Thiodolf: "We shall order us into three battles; the Wolfings and the Bearings to lead the first, for this is our business; but others of the smaller Houses this side the water to be with us; and the Elkings and Galtings and the other Houses of the Mid-mark on the further side of the water to be in the second, and with them the more part of the Nether-mark; but the men of Up-mark to be in the third, and the stay-at-homes to follow on with them: and this third battle to let the wood cover them till they be needed, which may not be till the day of fight draws to an end, when all shall be needed: for no Roman man must be left alive or untaken by this even, or else must we all go to the Gods together. Hearken, Arinbiorn. I am not called fore-sighted, and yet meseems I see somewhat how this day shall go; and it is not to be hidden that I shall not see another battle until the last of all battles is at hand. But be of good cheer, for I shall not die till the end of the fight, and once more I shall be a man's help unto you. Now the first of the Romans we meet shall not be able to stand before us, for they shall be unready, and when their men are gotten ready and are fighting with us grimly, ye of the second battle shall hear the war-token, and shall fall on, and they shall be dismayed when they see so many fresh men come into the fight; yet shall they stand stoutly; for they are valiant men, and shall not all be taken unawares. Then, if they withstand us long enough, shall the third battle come forth from the wood, and fall on either flank of them, and the day shall be won. But I think not that they shall withstand us so long, but that the men of Up-mark and the stay-at-homes shall have the chasing of them. Now get me my war-gear, and let the first battle get them to the outgate of the garth."

So they brought him his arms; and meanwhile the Hall-Sun spake to one of the Captains, and he turned and went away a little space, and then came back, having with him three strong warriors of the Wolfings, and he brought them before the Hall-Sun, who said to them:

"Ye three, Steinulf, Athalulf, and Grani the Grey, I have sent for you because ye are men both mighty in battle and deft wood-wrights and house-smiths; ye shall follow Thiodolf closely, when he winneth into the Roman garth, yet shall ye fight wisely, so that ye be not slain, or at

least not all; ye shall enter the Hall with Thiodolf, and when ye are therein, if need be, ye shall run down the Hall at your swiftest, and mount up into the loft betwixt the Middle-hearth and the Women's-Chamber, and there shall ye find good store of water in vats and tubs, and this ye shall use for quenching the fire of the Hall if the foemen fire it, as is not unlike to be."

Then Grani spoke for the others and said he would pay all heed to her words, and they departed to join their company.

Now was Thiodolf armed; and Arinbiorn, turning about before he went to his place, beheld him and knit his brow, and said: "What is this, Thiodolf? Didst thou not swear to the Gods not to bear helm or shield in the battles of this strife? yet hast thou Ivar's helm on thine head and his shield ready beside thee: wilt thou forswear thyself? so doing shalt thou bring woe upon the House."

"Arinbiorn," said Thiodolf, "where didst thou hear tell of me that I had made myself the thrall of the Gods? The oath that I sware was sworn when mine heart was not whole towards our people; and now will I break it that I may keep what of good intent there was in it, and cast away the rest. Long is the story; but if we journey together to-night I will tell it thee. Likewise I will tell it to the Gods if they look sourly upon me when I see them, and all shall be well."

He smiled as he spoke, and Arinbiorn smiled on him in turn and went his ways to array the host. But when he was gone Thiodolf was alone in that place with the Hall-Sun, and he turned to her, and kissed her, and caressed her fondly, and spake and said:

"So fare we, O my daughter, to the sundering of the ways;
Short is my journey henceforth to the door that ends my days,
And long the road that lieth as yet before thy feet.
How fain were I that thy journey from day to day were sweet
With peace to thee and pleasure; that a noble warrior's hand
In its early days might lead thee adown the flowery land,
And thy children in its noon-tide cling round about thy gown,
And the wise that thy womb has carried when the sun is going down,
Be thy happy fellow-farers to tell the tale of Earth,
But I wot that for no such sweetness did we bring thee unto birth,
But to be the soul of the Wolfings till the other days should come,
And the fruit of the kindreds' harvest with thee is garnered home.
Yet if for no blithe faring thy life-day is ordained,
Yet peace that long endureth maybe thy soul hath gained;
And thy sorrow of this even thy latest grief shall be,
The grief wherewith thou singest the death-song over me."

She looked up at him and smiled, though the tears were on her face; then she said:

"Though to-day the grief beginneth yet the bitterness is done.
Though my body wendeth barren 'neath the beams of the quickening sun,
Yet remembrance still abideth, and long after the days of my life
Shall I live in the tale of the morning, when they tell of the ending of strife;
And the deeds of this little hand, and the thought conceived in my heart,
And never again henceforward from the folk shall I fare apart.
And if of the Earth, my father, thou hast tidings in thy place
Thou shalt hear how they call me the Ransom and the Mother of happy days."

Then she wept outright for a brief space, and thereafter she said:

"Keep this in thine heart, O father, that I shall remember all
Since thou liftedst the she-wolf's nursling in the oak-tree's leafy hall.
Yea, every time I remember when hand in hand we went
Amidst the shafts of the beech-trees, and down to the youngling bent
The Folk-wolf in his glory when the eve of fight drew nigh;
And every time I remember when we wandered joyfully
Adown the sunny meadow and lived a while of life
'Midst the herbs and the beasts and the waters so free from fear and strife,
That thy years and thy might and thy wisdom, I had no part therein;
But thou wert as the twin-born brother of the maiden slim and thin,
The maiden shy in the feast-hall and blithe in wood and field.
Thus have we fared, my father; and e'en now when thou bearest shield,
On the last of thy days of mid-earth, twixt us 'tis even so
That the heart of my like-aged brother is the heart of thee that I know."

Then the bitterness of tears stayed her speech, and he spake no word more, but took her in his arms a while and soothed her and fondled her, and then they parted, and he went with great strides towards the outgoing of the Thing-stead.

There he found the warriors of his House and of the Bearings and the lesser Houses of Mid-mark, all duly ordered for wending through the wood. The dawn was coming on apace, but the wood was yet dark. But whereas the Wolfings led, and each man of them knew the wood like his own hand, there was no straying or disarray, and in less than a half-hour's

space Thiodolf and the first battle were come to the wood behind the hazel-trees at the back of the hall, and before them was the dawning round about the Roof of the Kindred; the eastern heavens were brightening, and they could see all things clear without the wood.

CHAPTER XXVIII—OF THE STORM OF DAWNING

Then Thiodolf bade Fox and two others steal forward, and see what of foemen was before them; so they fell to creeping on towards the open: but scarcely had they started, before all men could hear the tramp of men drawing nigh; then Thiodolf himself took with him a score of his House and went quietly toward the wood-edge till they were barely within the shadow of the beech-wood; and he looked forth and saw men coming straight towards their lurking-place. And those he saw were a good many, and they were mostly of the dastards of the Goths; but with them was a Captain of an Hundred of the Romans, and some others of his kindred; and Thiodolf deemed that the Goths had been bidden to gather up some of the night-watchers and enter the wood and fall on the stay-at-homes. So he bade his men get them aback, and he himself abode still at the very wood's edge listening intently with his sword bare in his hand. And he noted that those men of the foe stayed in the daylight outside the wood, but a few yards from it, and, by command as it seemed, fell silent and spake no word; and the morn was very still, and when the sound of their tramp over the grass had ceased, Thiodolf could hear the tramp of more men behind them. And then he had another thought, to wit that the Romans had sent scouts to see if the Goths yet abided on the vantage-ground by the ford, and that when they had found them gone, they were minded to fall on them unawares in the refuge of the Thing-stead and were about to do so by the counsel and leading of the dastard Goths; and that this was one body of the host led by those dastards, who knew somewhat of the woods. So he drew aback speedily, and catching hold of Fox by the shoulder (for he had taken him alone with him) he bade him creep along through the wood toward the Thing-stead, and bring back speedy word whether there were any more foemen near the wood thereaway; and he himself came to his men, and ordered them for onset, drawing them up in a shallow half moon, with the bowmen at the horns thereof, with the word to loose at the Romans as soon as they heard the war-horn blow: and all this was done speedily and with little noise, for they were well nigh so arrayed already.

Thus then they waited, and there was more than a glimmer of light even under the beechen leaves, and the eastern sky was yellowing to sunrise. The other warriors were like hounds in the leash eager to be slipped; but Thiodolf stood calm and high-hearted turning over the memory of past days, and the time he thought of seemed long to him, but happy.

Scarce had a score of minutes passed, and the Romans before them, who were now gathered thick behind those dastards of the Goths, had not moved, when back comes Fox and tells how he has come upon a great company of the Romans led by their thralls of the Goths who were just entering the wood, away there towards the Thing-stead.

"But, War-duke," says he, "I came also across our own folk of the second battle duly ordered in the wood ready to meet them; and they shall be well dealt with, and the sun shall rise for us and not for them."

Then turns Thiodolf round to those nighest to him and says, but still softly:

"Hear ye a word, O people, of the wisdom of the foe!
Before us thick they gather, and unto the death they go.
They fare as lads with their cur-dogs who have stopped a fox's earth,
And standing round the spiny, now chuckle in their mirth,
Till one puts by the leafage and trembling stands astare
At the sight of the Wood wolf's father arising in his lair—
They have come for our wives and our children, and our sword-edge shall they meet;
And which of them is happy save he of the swiftest feet?"

Speedily then went that word along the ranks of the Kindred, and men were merry with the restless joy of battle: but scarce had two minutes passed ere suddenly the stillness of the dawn was broken by clamour and uproar; by shouts and shrieks, and the clashing of weapons from the wood on their left hand; and over all arose the roar of the Markmen's horn, for the battle was joined with the second company of the Kindreds. But a rumour and murmur went from the foemen before Thiodolf's men; and then sprang forth the loud sharp word of the captains commanding and rebuking, as if the men were doubtful which way they should take.

Amidst all which Thiodolf brandished his sword, and cried out in a great voice:

"Now, now, ye War-sons!
Now the Wolf waketh!"

Lo how the Wood-beast
Wendeth in onset.
E'en as his feet fare
Fall on and follow!"

And he led forth joyously, and terrible rang the long refrained gathered shout of his battle as his folk rushed on together devouring the little space between their ambush and the hazel-beset greensward.

In the twinkling of an eye the half-moon had lapped around the Roman-Goths and those that were with them; and the dastards made no stand but turned about at once, crying out that the Gods of the Kindreds were come to aid and none could withstand them. But these fleers thrust against the band of Romans who were next to them, and bore them aback, and great was the turmoil; and when Thiodolf's storm fell full upon them, as it failed not to do, so close were they driven together that scarce could any man raise his hand for a stroke. For behind them stood a great company of those valiant spearmen of the Romans, who would not give way if anywise they might hold it out: and their ranks were closely serried, shield nigh touching shield, and their faces turned toward the foe; and so arrayed, though they might die, they scarce knew how to flee. As they might these thrust and hewed at the fleers, and gave fierce words but few to the Roman-Goths, driving them back against their foemen: but the fleers had lost the cunning of their right hands, and they had cast away their shields and could not defend their very bodies against the wrath of the kindreds; and when they strove to flee to the right hand or to the left, they were met by the horns of the half-moon, and the arrows began to rain in upon them, and from so close were they shot at that no shaft failed to smite home.

There then were the dastards slain; and their bodies served for a rampart against the onrush of the Markmen to those Romans who had stood fast. To them were gathering more and more every minute, and they faced the Goths steadily with their hard brown visages and gleaming eyes above their iron-plated shields; not casting their spears, but standing closely together, silent, but fierce. The light was spread now over all the earth; the eastern heavens were grown golden-red, flecked here and there with little crimson clouds: this battle was fallen near silent, but to the North was great uproar of shouts and cries, and the roaring of the war-horns, and the shrill blasts of the brazen trumpets.

Now Thiodolf, as his wont was when he saw that all was going well, had refrained himself of hand-strokes, but was here and there and everywhere giving heart to his folk, and keeping them in due order, and close array, lest the Romans should yet come among them. But he watched the ranks of the foe, and saw how presently they began to spread out beyond his, and might, if it were not looked to, take them in flank; and he was about to order his men anew to meet them, when he looked on his left hand and saw how Roman men were pouring thick from the wood out of all array, followed by a close throng of the kindreds: for on this side the Romans were outnumbered and had stumbled unawares into the ambush of the Markmen, who had fallen on them straightway and disarrayed them from the first. This flight of their folk the Romans saw also, and held their men together, refraining from the onset, as men who deem that they will have enough to do to stand fast.

But the second battle of the Markmen, (who were of the Nether-mark, mingled with the Mid-mark) fought wisely, for they swept those fleers from before them, slaying many and driving the rest scattering, yet held the chase for no long way, but wheeling about came sidelong on toward the battle of the Romans and Thiodolf. And when Thiodolf saw that, he set up the whoop of victory, he and his, and fell fiercely on the Romans, casting everything that would fly, as they rushed on to the handplay; so that there was many a Roman slain with the Roman spears that those who had fallen had left among their foemen.

Now the Roman captains perceived that it availed not to tarry till the men of the Mid and Nether-marks fell upon their flank; so they gave command, and their ranks gave back little by little, facing their foes, and striving to draw themselves within the dike and garth, which, after their custom, they had already cast up about the Wolfing Roof, their stronghold.

Now as fierce as was the onset of the Markmen, the main body of the Romans could not be hindered from doing this much before the men of the second battle were upon them; but Thiodolf and Arinbiorn with some of the mightiest brake their array in two places and entered in amongst them. And wrath so seized upon the soul of Arinbiorn for the slaying of Otter, and his own fault towards him, that he cast away his shield, and heeding no strokes, first brake his sword in the press, and then, getting hold of a great axe, smote at all before him

as though none smote at him in turn; yea, as though he were smiting down tree-boles for a match against some other mighty man; and all the while amidst the hurry, strokes of swords and spears rained on him, some falling flatwise and some glancing sideways, but some true and square, so that his helm was smitten off and his hauberk rent adown, and point and edge reached his living flesh; and he had thrust himself so far amidst the foe that none could follow to shield him, so that at last he fell shattered and rent at the foot of the new clayey wall cast up by the Romans, even as Thiodolf and a band with him came cleaving the press, and the Romans closed the barriers against friend and foe, and cast great beams adown, and masses of iron and lead and copper taken from the smithying-booths of the Wolfings, to stay them if it were but a little.

Then Thiodolf bestrode the fallen warrior, and men of his House were close behind him, for wisely had he fought, cleaving the press like a wedge, helping his friends that they might help him, so that they all went forward together. But when he saw Arinbiorn fall he cried out:

“Woe’s me, Arinbiorn! that thou wouldest not wait for me; for the day is young yet, and over-young!”

There then they cleared the space outside the gate, and lifted up the Bearing Warrior, and bare him back from the rampart. For so fierce had been the fight and so eager the storm of those that had followed after him that they must needs order their battle afresh, since Thiodolf’s wedge which he had driven into the Roman host was but of a few and the foe had been many and the rampart and the shot-weapons were close anigh. Wise therefore it seemed to abide them of the second battle and join with them to swarm over the new-built slippery wall in the teeth of the Roman shot.

In this, the first onset of the Morning Battle, some of the Markmen had fallen, but not many, since but a few had entered outright into the Roman ranks; and when they first rushed on from the wood but three of them were slain, and the slaughter was all of the dastards and the Romans; and afterwards not a few of the Romans were slain, what by Arinbiorn, what by the others; for they were fighting fleeing, and before their eyes was the image of the garth-gate which was behind them; and they stumbled against each other as they were driven sideways against the onrush of the Goths, nor were they now standing fair and square to them, and they were hurried and confused with the dread of the onset of them of the two Marks.

As yet Thiodolf had gotten no great hurt, so that when he heard that Arinbiorn’s soul had passed away he smiled and said:

“Yea, yea, Arinbiorn might have abided the end, for ere then shall the battle be hard.”

So now the Wolfings and the Bearings met joyously the kindreds of the Nether Mark and the others of the second battle, and they sang the song of victory arrayed in good order hard by the Roman rampart, while bowstrings twanged and arrows whistled, and sling-stones hummed from this side and from that.

And of their song of victory thus much the tale telleth:

“Now hearken and hear
Of the day-dawn of fear,
And how up rose the sun
On the battle begun.
All night lay a-hiding,
Our anger abiding,
Dark down in the wood
The sharp seekers of blood;
But ere red grew the heaven we bore them all bare,
For against us undriven the foemen must fare;
They sought and they found us, and sorrowed to find,
For the tree-boles around us the story shall mind,
How fast from the glooming they fled to the light,
Yeastaying the dooming of Tyr of the fight.
“Hearken yet and again
How the night gan to wane,
And the twilight stole on
Till the world was well won!
E’en in such wise was wending
A great host for our ending;
On our life-days e’en so
Stole the host of the foe;
Till the heavens grew lighter, and light grew the world,
And the storm of the fighter upon them was hurled,
Then some fled the stroke, and some died and some stood,
Till the worst of the storm broke right out from the wood,
And the war-shafts were singing the carol of fear,

The tale of the bringing the sharp swords anear.
 "Come gather we now,
 For the day doth grow.
 Come, gather, ye bold,
 Lest the day wax old;
 Lest not till to-morrow
 We slake our sorrow,
 And heap the ground
 With many a mound.
 Come, war-children, gather, and clear we the land!
 In the tide of War-father the deed is to hand.
 Clad in gear that we gilded they shrink from our sword;
 In the House that we builded they sit at the board;
 Come, war-children, gather, come swarm o'er the wall
 For the feast of War-father to sweep out the Hall!"

Now amidst of their singing the sun rose upon the earth, and gleamed in the arms of men, and lit the faces of the singing warriors as they stood turned toward the east.

In this first onset of battle but twenty and three Markmen were slain in all, besides Arin-biorn; for, as aforesaid, they had the foe at a disadvantage. And this onset is called in the tale the Storm of Dawning.

CHAPTER XXI—OF THIODOLF'S STORM

The Goths tarried not over their victory; they shot with all the bowmen that they had against the Romans on the wall, and therewith arrayed themselves to fall on once more. And Thiodolf, now that the foe were covered by a wall, though it was but a little one, sent a message to the men of the third battle, them of Up-mark to wit, to come forward in good array and help to make a ring around the Wolfing Stead, wherein they should now take the Romans as a beast is taken in a trap. Meanwhile, until they came, he sent other men to the wood to bring tree-boles to batter the gate, and to make bridges whereby to swarm over the wall, which was but breast-high on the Roman side, though they had worked at it ceaselessly since yesterday morning.

In a long half-hour, therefore, the horns of the men of Up-mark sounded, and they came forth from the wood a very great company, for with them also were the men of the stay-at-homes and the homeless, such of them as were fit to bear arms. Amongst these went the Hall-Sun surrounded by a band of the warriors of Up-mark; and before her was borne her namesake the Lamp as a sign of assured victory. But these stay-at-homes with the Hall-Sun were stayed by the command of Thiodolf on the crown of the slope above the dwellings, and stood round about the Speech-Hill, on the topmost of which stood the Hall-Sun, and the wondrous Lamp, and the men who warded her and it.

When the Romans saw the new host come forth from the wood, they might well think that they would have work enough to do that day; but when they saw the Hall-Sun take her stand on the Speech-Hill with the men-at-arms about her, and the Lamp before her, then dread of the Gods fell upon them, and they knew that the doom had gone forth against them. Nevertheless they were not men to faint and die because the Gods were become their foes, but they were resolved rather to fight it out to the end against whatsoever might come against them, as was well seen afterwards.

Now they had made four gates to their garth according to their custom, and at each gate within was there a company of their mightiest men, and each was beset by the best of the Markmen. Thiodolf and his men beset the western gate where they had made that fierce onset. And the northern gate was beset by the Elkins and some of the kindreds of the Nether-mark; and the eastern gate by the rest of the men of Nether-mark; and the southern gate by the kindreds of Up-mark.

All this the Romans noted, and they saw how that the Markmen were now very many, and they knew that they were men no less valiant than themselves, and they perceived that Thiodolf was a wise Captain; and in less than two hours' space from the Storm of Dawning they saw those men coming from the wood with plenteous store of tree-trunks to bridge their ditch and rampart; and they considered how the day was yet very young, so that they might look for no shelter from the night-tide; and as for any aid from their own folk at the war-garth aforesaid, they hoped not for it, nor had they sent any messenger to the Captain of the garth; nor did they know as yet of his overthrow on the Ridge.

Now therefore there seemed to be but two choices before them; either to abide within the rampart they had cast up, or to break out like valiant men, and either die in the storm, or cleave

a way through, whereby they might come to their kindred and their stronghold south-east of the Mark.

This last way then they chose; or, to say the truth, it was their chief captain who chose it for them, though they were nothing loth thereto: for this man was a mocker, yet hot-headed, unstable, and nought wise in war, and heretofore had his greed minished his courage; yet now, being driven into a corner, he had courage enough and to spare, but utterly lacked patience; for it had been better for the Romans to have abided one or two onsets from the Goths, whereby they who should make the onslaught would at the least have lost more men than they on whom they should fall, before they within stormed forth on them; but their pride took away from the Romans their last chance. But their captain, now that he perceived, as he thought, that the game was lost and his life come to its last hour wherein he would have to leave his treasure and pleasure behind him, grew desperate and therewith most fierce and cruel. So all the captives whom they had taken (they were but two score and two, for the wounded men they had slain) he caused to be bound on the chairs of the high-seat clad in their war-gear with their swords or spears made fast to their right hands, and their shields to their left hands; and he said that the Goths should now hold a Thing wherein they should at last take counsel wisely, and abstain from folly. For he caused store of faggots and small wood smeared with grease and oil to be cast into the hall that it might be fired, so that it and the captives should burn up altogether; "So," said he, "shall we have a fair torch for our funeral fire;" for it was the custom of the Romans to burn their dead.

Thus, then, he did; and then he caused men to do away the barriers and open all the four gates of the new-made garth, after he had manned the wall with the slingers and bowmen, and slain the horses, so that the woodland folk should have no gain of them. Then he arrayed his men at the gates and about them duly and wisely, and bade those valiant footmen fall on the Goths who were getting ready to fall on them, and to do their best. But he himself armed at all points took his stand at the Man's-door of the Hall, and swore by all the Gods of his kindred that he would not move a foot's length from thence either for fire or for steel.

So fiercely on that fair morning burned the hatred of men about the dwellings of the children of the Wolf of the Goths, wherein the children of the Wolf of Rome were shut up as in a penfold of slaughter.

Meanwhile the Hall-Sun standing on the Hill of Speech beheld it all, looking down into the garth of war; for the new wall was no hindrance to her sight, because the Speech-Hill was high and but a little way from the Great Roof; and indeed she was within shot of the Roman bowmen, though they were not very deft in shooting.

So now she lifted up her voice and sang so that many heard her; for at this moment of time there was a lull in the clamour of battle both within the garth and without; even as it happens when the thunder-storm is just about to break on the world, that the wind drops dead, and the voice of the leaves is hushed before the first great and near flash of lightening glares over the fields.

So she sang:

"Now the latest hour cometh and the ending of the strife;
And to-morrow and to-morrow shall we take the hand of life,
And wend adown the meadows, and skirt the darkling wood,
And reap the waving acres, and gather in the good.
I see a wall before me built up of steel and fire,
And hurts and heart-sick striving, and the war-wright's fierce desire;
But there-amidst a door is, and windows are therein;
And the fair sun-litten meadows and the Houses of the kin
Smile on me through the terror my trembling life to stay,
That at my mouth now flutters, as fain to flee away.
Lo e'en as the little hammer and the blow-pipe of the wright
About the flickering fire deals with the silver white,
And the cup and its beauty groweth that shall be for the people's feast,
And all men are glad to see it from the greatest to the least;
E'en so is the tale now fashioned, that many a time and oft
Shall be told on the acre's edges, when the summer eve is soft;
Shall be hearkened round the hall-blaze when the mid-winter night
The kindreds' mirth besetteth, and quickeneth man's delight,
And we that have lived in the story shall be born again and again
As men feast on the bread of our earning, and praise the grief-born grain."

As she made an end of singing, those about her understood her words, that she was fore-telling victory, and the peace of the Mark, and for joy they raised a shrill cry; and the warriors who were nighest to her took it up, and it spread through the whole host round about the

garth, and went up into the breath of the summer morning and went down the wind along the meadow of the Wolfings, so that they of the wain-burg, who were now drawing somewhat near to Wolf-stead heard it and were glad.

But the Romans when they heard it knew that the heart of the battle was reached, and they cast back that shout wrathfully and fiercely, and made toward the foe.

Therewithal those mighty men fell on each other in the narrow passes of the garth; for fear was dead and buried in that Battle of the Morning.

On the North gate Hiarandi of the Elkings was the point of the Markmen's wedge, and first clave the Roman press. In the Eastern gate it was Valtyr, Otter's brother's son, a young man and most mighty. In the South gate it was Geirbald of the Shieldings, the Messenger.

In the west gate Thiodolf the War-duke gave one mighty cry like the roar of an angry lion, and cleared a space before him for the wielding of Ivar's blade; for at that moment he had looked up to the Roof of the Kindred and had beheld a little stream of smoke curling blue out of a window thereof, and he knew what had betided, and how short was the time before them. But his wrathful cry was taken up by some who had beheld that same sight, and by others who saw nought but the Roman press, and terribly it rang over the swaying struggling crowd.

Then fell the first rank of the Romans before those stark men and mighty warriors; and they fell even where they stood, for on neither side could any give back but for a little space, so close the press was, and the men so eager to smite. Neither did any crave peace if he were hurt or disarmed; for to the Goths it was but a little thing to fall in hot blood in that hour of love of the kindred, and longing for the days to be. And for the Romans, they had had no mercy, and now looked for none: and they remembered their dealings with the Goths, and saw before them, as it were, once more, yea, as in a picture, their slayings and quellings, and lashings, and cold mockings which they had dealt out to the conquered foemen without mercy, and now they longed sore for the quiet of the dark, when their hard lives should be over, and all these deeds forgotten, and they and their bitter foes should be at rest for ever.

Most valiantly they fought; but the fury of their despair could not deal with the fearless hope of the Goths, and as rank after rank of them took the place of those who were hewn down by Thiodolf and the Kindred, they fell in their turn, and slowly the Goths cleared a space within the gates, and then began to spread along the wall within, and grew thicker and thicker. Nor did they fight only at the gates; but made them bridges of those tree-trunks, and fell to swarming over the rampart, till they had cleared it of the bowmen and slingers, and then they leaped down and fell upon the flanks of the Romans; and the host of the dead grew, and the host of the living lessened.

Moreover the stay-at-homes round about the Speech-Hill, and that band of the warriors of Up-mark who were with them, beheld the Great Roof and saw the smoke come gushing out of the windows, and at last saw the red flames creep out amidst it and waver round the window jambs like little banners of scarlet cloth. Then they could no longer refrain themselves, but ran down from the Speech-Hill and the slope about it with great and fierce cries, and clomb the wall where it was unmanned, helping each other with hand and back, both stark warriors, and old men and lads and women: and thus they gat them into the garth and fell upon the lessening band of the Romans, who now began to give way hither and thither about the garth, as they best might.

Thus it befell at the West-gate, but at the other gates it was no worse, for there was no diversity of valour between the Houses; nay, whereas the more part and the best part of the Romans faced the onset of Thiodolf, which seemed to them the main onset, they were somewhat easier to deal with elsewhere than at the West gate; and at the East gate was the place first won, so that Valtyr and his folk were the first to clear a space within the gate, and to tell the tale shortly (for can this that and the other sword-stroke be told of in such a medley?) they drew the death-ring around the Romans that were before them, and slew them all to the last man, and then fell fiercely on the rearward of them of the North gate, who still stood before Hiarandi's onset. There again was no long tale to tell of, for Hiarandi was just winning the gate, and the wall was cleared of the Roman shot-fighters, and the Markmen were standing on the top thereof, and casting down on the Romans spears and baulks of wood and whatsoever would fly. There again were the Romans all slain or put out of the fight, and the two bands of the kindred joined together, and with what voices the battle-rage had left them cried out for joy and fared on together to help to bind the sheaves of war which Thiodolf's sickle had

reaped. And now it was mere slaying, and the Romans, though they still fought in knots of less than a score, yet fought on and hewed and thrust without more thought or will than the stone has when it leaps adown the hill-side after it has first been set agoing.

But now the garth was fairly won and Thiodolf saw that there was no hope for the Romans drawing together again; so while the kindreds were busied in hewing down those knots of desperate men, he gathered to him some of the wisest of his warriors, amongst whom were Steinulf and Grani the Grey, the deft wood-wrights (but Athalulf had been grievously hurt by a spear and was out of the battle), and drave a way through the confused turmoil which still boiled in the garth there, and made straight for the Man's-door of the Hall. Soon he was close thereto, having hewn away all fleers that hindered him, and the doorway was before him. But on the threshold, the fire and flames of the kindled hall behind him, stood the Roman Captain clad in gold-adorned armour and surcoat of sea-born purple; the man was cool and calm and proud, and a mocking smile was on his face: and he bore his bright blade unbloodied in his hand.

Thiodolf stayed a moment of time, and their eyes met; it had gone hard with the War-duke, and those eyes glittered in his pale face, and his teeth were close set together; though he had fought wisely, and for life, as he who is most valiant ever will do, till he is driven to bay like the lone wood-wolf by the hounds, yet had he been sore mishandled. His helm and shield were gone, his hauberk rent; for it was no dwarf-wrought coat, but the work of Ivar's hand: the blood was running down from his left arm, and he was hurt in many places: he had broken Ivar's sword in the medley, and now bore in his hand a strong Roman short-sword, and his feet stood bloody on the worn earth anigh the Man's-door.

He looked into the scornful eyes of the Roman lord for a little minute and then laughed aloud, and therewithal, leaping on him with one spring, turned sideways, and dealt him a great buffet on his ear with his unarmed left hand, just as the Roman thrust at him with his sword, so that the Captain staggered forward on to the next man following, which was Wolfkettle the eager warrior, who thrust him through with his sword and shoved him aside as they all strode into the hall together. Howbeit no sword fell from the Roman Captain as he fell, for Thiodolf's side bore it into the Hall of the Wolfings.

Most wrathful were those men, and went hastily, for their Roof was full of smoke, and the flames flickered about the pillars and the wall here and there, and crept up to the windows aloft; yet was it not wholly or fiercely burning; for the Roman fire-raisers had been hurried and hasty in their work. Straightway then Steinulf and Grani led the others off at a run towards the loft and the water; but Thiodolf, who went slowly and painfully, looked and beheld on the dais those men bound for the burning, and he went quietly, and as a man who has been sick, and is weak, up on to the dais, and said:

"Be of good cheer, O brothers, for the kindreds have vanquished the foemen, and the end of strife is come."

His voice sounded strange and sweet to them amidst the turmoil of the fight without; he laid down his sword on the table, and drew a little sharp knife from his girdle and cut their bonds one by one and loosed them with his blood-stained hands; and each one as he loosed him he kissed and said to him, "Brother, go help those who are quenching the fire; this is the bidding of the War-duke."

But as he loosed one after other he was longer and longer about it, and his words were slower. At last he came to the man who was bound in his own high-seat close under the place of the wondrous Lamp, the Hall-Sun, and he was the only one left bound; that man was of the Wormings and was named Elfric; he loosed him and was long about it; and when he was done he smiled on him and kissed him, and said to him:

"Arise, brother! go help the quenchers of the fire, and leave to me this my chair, for I am weary: and if thou wilt, thou mayst bring me of that water to drink, for this morning men have forgotten the mead of the reapers!"

Then Elfric arose, and Thiodolf sat in his chair, and leaned back his head; but Elfric looked at him for a moment as one scared, and then ran his ways down the hall, which now was growing noisy with the hurry and bustle of the quenchers of the fire, to whom had divers others joined themselves.

There then from a bucket which was still for a moment he filled a wooden bowl, which he caught up from the base of one of the hall-pillars, and hastened up the Hall again; and there was no man nigh the dais, and Thiodolf yet sat in his chair, and the hall was dim with the

rolling smoke, and Elfric saw not well what the War-duke was doing. So he hastened on, and when he was close to Thiodolf he trod in something wet, and his heart sank for he knew that it was blood; his foot slipped therewith and as he put out his hand to save himself the more part of the water was spilled, and mingled with the blood. But he went up to Thiodolf and said to him, "Drink, War-duke! here hath come a mouthful of water."

But Thiodolf moved not for his word, and Elfric touched him, and he moved none the more.

Then Elfric's heart failed him and he laid his hand on the War-duke's hand, and looked closely into his face; and the hand was cold and the face ashen-pale; and Elfric laid his hand on his side, and he felt the short-sword of the Roman leader thrust deep therein, besides his many other hurts.

So Elfric knew that he was dead, and he cast the bowl to the earth, and lifted up his hands and wailed out aloud, like a woman who hath come suddenly on her dead child, and cried out in a great voice:

"Hither, hither, O men in this hall, for the War-duke of the Markmen is dead! O ye people, Hearken! Thiodolf the Mighty, the Wolfing is dead!"

And he was a young man, and weak with the binding and the waiting for death, and he bowed himself adown and crouched on the ground and wept aloud.

But even as he cried that cry, the sunlight outside the Man's-door was darkened, and the Hall-Sun came over the threshold in her ancient gold-embroidered raiment, holding in her hand her namesake the wondrous Lamp; and the spears and the war-gear of warriors gleamed behind her; but the men tarried on the threshold till she turned about and beckoned to them, and then they poured in through the Man's-door, their war-gear rent and they all befouled and disarrayed with the battle, but with proud and happy faces: as they entered she waved her hand to them to bid them go join the quenchers of the fire; so they went their ways.

But she went with unfaltering steps up to the dais, and the place where the chain of the Lamp hung down from amidst the smoke-cloud wavering a little in the gusts of the hall. Straightway she made the Lamp fast to its chain, and dealt with its pulleys with a deft hand often practised therein, and then let it run up toward the smoke-hidden Roof till it gleamed in its due place once more, a token of the salvation of the Wolfings and the welfare of all the kindreds.

Then she turned toward Thiodolf with a calm and solemn face, though it was very pale and looked as if she would not smile again. Elfric had risen up and was standing by the board speechless and the passion of sobs still struggling in his bosom. She put him aside gently, and went up to Thiodolf and stood above him, and looked down on his face a while: then she put forth her hand and closed his eyes, and stooped down and kissed his face. Then she stood up again and faced the Hall and looked and saw that many were streaming in, and that though the smoke was still eddying overhead, the fire was well nigh quenched within; and without the sound of battle had sunk and died away. For indeed the Markmen had ended their day's work before noon-tide that day, and the more part of the Romans were slain, and to the rest they had given peace till the Folk-mote should give Doom concerning them; for pity of these valiant men was growing in the hearts of the valiant men who had vanquished them, now that they feared them no more.

And this second part of the Morning Battle is called Thiodolf's Storm.

So now when the Hall-Sun looked and beheld that the battle was done and the fire quenched, and when she saw how every man that came into the Hall looked up and beheld the wondrous Lamp and his face quickened into joy at the sight of it; and how most looked up at the high-seat and Thiodolf lying leaned back therein, her heart nigh broke between the thought of her grief and of the grief of the Folk that their mighty friend was dead, and the thought of the joy of the days to be and all the glory that his latter days had won. But she gathered heart, and casting back the dark tresses of her hair, she lifted up her voice and cried out till its clear shrillness sounded throughout all the Roof:

"O men in this Hall the War-duke is dead! O people hearken! for Thiodolf the Mighty hath changed his life: Come hither, O men, Come hither, for this is true, that Thiodolf is dead!"

CHAPTER XXX—THIODOLF IS BORNE OUT OF THE HALL AND OTTER IS LAID BESIDE HIM

So when they heard her voice they came thither flockmeal, and a great throng mingled of many kindreds was in the Hall, but with one consent they made way for the Children of the Wolf to stand nearest to the dais. So there they stood, the warriors mingled with the women,

the swains with the old men, the freemen with the thralls: for now the stay-at-homes of the House were all gotten into the garth, and the more part of them had flowed into the feast-hall when they knew that the fire was slackening.

All these now had heard the clear voice of the Hall-Sun, or others had told them what had befallen; and the wave of grief had swept coldly over them amidst their joy of the recoverance of their dwelling-place; yet they would not wail nor cry aloud, even to ease their sorrow, till they had heard the words of the Hall-Sun, as she stood facing them beside their dead War-duce.

Then she spake: "O Sorli the Old, come up hither! thou hast been my fellow in arms this long while."

So the old man came forth, and went slowly in his clashing war-gear up on to the dais. But his attire gleamed and glittered, since over-old was he to thrust deep into the press that day, howbeit he was wise in war. So he stood beside her on the dais holding his head high, and proud he looked, for all his thin white locks and sunken eyes.

But again said the Hall-Sun: "Canst thou hear me, Wolfkettle, when I bid thee stand beside me, or art thou, too, gone on the road to Valhall?"

Forth then strode that mighty warrior and went toward the dais: nought fair was his array to look on; for point and edge had rent it and stained it red, and the flaring of the hall-flames had blackened it; his face was streaked with black withal, and his hands were as the hands of a smith among the thralls who hath wrought unwashen in the haste and hurry when men look to see the war-arrow abroad. But he went up on to the dais and held up his head proudly, and looked forth on to the hall-crowd with eyes that gleamed fiercely from his stained and blackened face.

Again the Hall-Sun said: "Art thou also alive, O Egil the messenger? Swift are thy feet, but not to flee from the foe: Come up and stand with us!"

Therewith Egil clave the throng; he was not so roughly dealt with as was Wolfkettle, for he was a bowman, and had this while past shot down on the Romans from aloof; and he yet held his bended bow in his hand. He also came up on to the dais and stood beside Wolfkettle glancing down on the hall-crowd, looking eagerly from side to side.

Yet again the Hall-Sun spake: "No aliens now are dwelling in the Mark; come hither, ye men of the kindreds! Come thou, our brother Hiarandi of the Elkins, for thy sisters, our wives, are fain of thee. Come thou, Valtyr of the Laxings, brother's son of Otter; do thou for the War-duce what thy father's brother had done, had he not been faring afar. Come thou, Geirbald of the Shieldings the messenger! Now know we the deeds of others and thy deeds. Come, stand beside us for a little!"

Forth then they came in their rent and battered war-gear: and the tall Hiarandi bore but the broken truncheon of his sword; and Valtyr a woodman's axe notched and dull with work; and Geirbald a Roman cast-spear, for his own weapons had been broken in the medley; and he came the last of the three, going as a belated reaper from the acres. There they stood by the others and gazed adown the hall-throng.

But the Hall-Sun spake again: "Agni of the Daylings, I see thee now. How camest thou into the hard handplay, old man? Come hither and stand with us, for we love thee. Angantyr of the Bearings, fair was thy riding on the day of the Battle on the Ridge! Come thou, be with us. Shall the Beamings whose daughters we marry fail the House of the Wolf to-day? Geirodd, thou hast no longer a weapon, but the fight is over, and this hour thou needest it not. Come to us, brother! Gunbald of the Vallings, the Falcon on thy shield is dim with the dint of point and edge, but it hath done its work to ward thy valiant heart: Come hither, friend! Come all ye and stand with us!"

As she named them so they came, and they went up on to the dais and stood altogether; and a terrible band of warriors they looked had the fight been to begin over again, and they to meet death once more. And again spake the Hall-Sun:

"Steinulf and Grani, deft are your hands! Take ye the stalks of the war blossoms, the spears of the kindreds, and knit them together to make a bier for our War-duce, for he is weary and may not go afoot. Thou Ali, son of Grey; thou hast gone errands for me before; go forth now from the garth, and wend thy ways toward the water, and tell me when thou comest back what thou hast seen of the coming of the wain-burg. For by this time it should be drawing anigh."

So Ali went forth, and there was silence of words for a while in the Hall; but there arose the sound of the wood-wrights busy with the wimble and the hammer about the bier. No long space had gone by when Ali came back into the hall panting with his swift running; and he cried out:

“O Hall-Sun, they are coming; the last wain hath crossed the ford, and the first is hard at hand: bright are their banners in the sun.”

Then said the Hall-Sun: “O warriors, it is fitting that we go to meet our banners returning from the field, and that we do the Gods to wit what deeds we have done; fitting is it also that Thiodolf our War-duke wend with us. Now get ye into your ordered bands, and go we forth from the fire-scorched hall, and out into the sunlight, that the very earth and the heavens may look upon the face of our War-duke, and bear witness that he hath played his part as a man.”

Then without more words the folk began to stream out of the Hall, and within the garth which the Romans had made they arrayed their companies. But when they were all gone from the Hall save they who were on the dais, the Hall-Sun took the waxen torch which she had litten and quenched at the departure of the host to battle, and now she once more kindled it at the flame of the wondrous Lamp, the Hall-Sun. But the wood-wrights brought the bier which they had made of the spear-shafts of the kindred, and they laid thereon a purple cloak gold-embroidered of the treasure of the Wolfings, and thereon was Thiodolf laid.

Then those men took him up; to wit, Sorli the Old, and Wolfkettle and Egil, all these were of the Wolfing House; Hiarandi of the Elkings also, and Valtyr of the Laxings, Geirbald of the Shieldings, Agni of the Daylings, Angantyr of the Bearings, Geirodd of the Beamings, Gunbald of the Vallings: all these, with the two valiant wood-wrights, Steinulf and Grani, laid hand to the bier.

So they bore it down from the dais, and out at the Man’s-door into the sunlight, and the Hall-Sun followed close after it, holding in her hand the Candle of Returning. It was an hour after high-noon of a bright midsummer day when she came out into the garth; and the smoke from the fire-scorched hall yet hung about the trees of the wood-edge. She looked neither down towards her feet nor on the right side or the left, but straight before her. The ordered companies of the kindreds hid the sight of many fearful things from her eyes; though indeed the thralls and women had mostly gleaned the dead from the living both of friend and foe, and were tending the hurt of either host. Through an opening in the ranks moreover could they by the bier behold the scanty band of Roman captives, some standing up, looking dully around them, some sitting or lying on the grass talking quietly together, and it seemed by their faces that for them the bitterness of death was passed.

Forth then fared the host by the West gate, where Thiodolf had done so valiantly that day, and out on to the green amidst the booths and lesser dwellings. Sore then was the heart of the Hall-Sun, as she looked forth over dwelling, and acre, and meadow, and the blue line of the woods beyond the water, and bethought her of all the familiar things that were within the compass of her eyesight, and remembered the many days of her father’s loving-kindness, and the fair words wherewith he had solaced her life-days. But of the sorrow that wrung her heart nothing showed in her face, nor was she paler now than her wont was. For high was her courage, and she would in no wise mar that fair day and victory of the kindreds with grief for what was gone, whereas so much of what once was, yet abided and should abide for ever.

Then fared they down through the acres, where what was yet left of the wheat was yellowing toward harvest, and the rye hung grey and heavy; for bright and hot had the weather been all through these tidings. Howbeit much of the corn was spoiled by the trampling of the Roman bands.

So came they into the fair open meadow and saw before them the wains coming to meet them with their folk; to wit a throng of stout carles of the thrall-folk led by the war-wise and ripe men of the Steerings. Bright was the gleaming of the banner-wains, though for the lack of wind the banners hung down about their staves; the sound of the lowing of the bulls and the oxen, the neighing of horses and bleating of the flocks came up to the ears of the host as they wended over the meadow.

They made stay at last on the rising ground, all trampled and in parts bloody, where yesterday Thiodolf had come on the fight between the remnant of Otter’s men and the Romans: there they opened their ranks, and made a ring round about a space, amidmost of which was a little mound whereon was set the bier of Thiodolf. The wains and their warders came up with them and drew a garth of the wains round about the ring of men with the banners of the

kindreds in their due places.

There was the Wolf and the Elk, the Falcon, the Swan, the Boar, the Bear, and the Green-tree: the Willow-bush, the Gedde, the Water-bank and the Wood-Ousel, the Steer, the Mallard and the Roe-deer: all these were of the Mid-mark. But of the Upper-mark were the Horse and the Spear, and the Shield, and the Daybreak, and the Dale, and the Mountain, and the Brook, and the Weasel, and the Cloud, and the Hart.

Of the Nether-mark were the Salmon, and the Lynx, and the Ling worm, the Seal, the Stone, and the Sea-mew; the Buck-goat, the Apple-tree, the Bull, the Adder, and the Crane.

There they stood in the hot sunshine three hours after noon; and a little wind came out of the west and raised the pictured cloths upon the banner-staves, so that the men could now see the images of the tokens of their Houses and the Fathers of old time.

Now was there silence in the ring of men; but it opened presently and through it came all-armed warriors bearing another bier, and lo, Otter upon it, dead in his war-gear with many a grievous wound upon his body. For men had found him in an angle of the wall of the Great Roof, where he had been laid yesterday by the Romans when his company and the Bearings with the Wormings made their onset: for the Romans had noted his exceeding valour, and when they had driven off the Goths some of them brought him dead inside their garth, for they would know the name and dignity of so valorous a man.

So now they bore him to the mound where Thiodolf lay and set the bier down beside Thiodolf's, and the two War-dukes of the Markmen lay there together: and when the warriors beheld that sight, they could not forbear, but some groaned aloud, and some wept great tears, and they clashed their swords on their shields and the sound of their sorrow and their praise went up to the summer heavens.

Now the Hall-Sun holding aloft the waxen torch lifted up her voice and said:

"O warriors of the Wolfings, by the token of the flame
That here in my right hand flickers, ye are back at the House of the Name,
And there yet burneth the Hall-Sun beneath the Wolfing Roof,
And the flame that the foemen quickened hath died out far aloof.
Ye gleanings of the battle, lift up your hearts on high,
For the House of the War-wise Wolfings and the Folk undoomed to die.
But ye kindreds of the Markmen, the Wolfing guests are ye,
And to-night we hold the high-tide, and great shall the feasting be,
For to-day by the road that we know not a many wend their ways
To the Gods and the ancient Fathers, and the hope of the latter days.
And how shall their feet be cumbered if we tangle them with woe,
And the heavy rain of sorrow drift o'er the road they go?
They have toiled, and their toil was troublous to make the days to come;
Use ye their gifts in gladness, lest they grieve for the Ancient Home!
Now are our maids arraying that fire-scorched Hall of ours
With the treasure of the Wolfings and the wealth of summer flowers,
And this eve the work before you will be the Hall to throng
And purge its walls of sorrow and quench its scathe and wrong."

She looked on the dead Thiodolf a moment, and then glanced from him to Otter and spake again:

"O kindreds, here before you two mighty bodies lie;
Henceforth no man shall see them in house and field go by
As we were used to behold them, familiar to us then
As the wind beneath the heavens and the sun that shines on men;
Now soon shall there be nothing of their dwelling-place to tell,
Save the billow of the meadows, the flower-grown grassy swell!
Now therefore, O ye kindreds, if amidst you there be one
Who hath known the heart of the War-dukes, and the deeds their hands have done,
Will not the word be with him, while yet your hearts are hot,
Of our praise and long remembrance, and our love that dieth not?
Then let him come up hither and speak the latest word
O'er the limbs of the battle-weary and the hearts outworn with the sword."

She held her peace, and there was a stir in the ring of men: for they who were anigh the Dayling banner saw an old warrior sitting on a great black horse and fully armed. He got slowly off his horse and walked toward the ring of warriors, which opened before him; for all knew him for Asmund the old, the war-wise warrior of the Daylings, even he who had lamented over the Hauberk of Thiodolf. He had taken horse the day before, and had ridden toward the battle, but was belated, and had come up with them of the wain-burg just as they had crossed the water.

CHAPTER XXXI—OLD ASMUND SPEAKETH OVER THE WAR-DUKES: THE DEAD ARE LAID IN MOUND

Now while all looked on, he went to the place where lay the bodies of the War-dukes, and looked down on the face of Otter and said:

“O Otter, there thou liest! and thou that I knew of old,
 When my beard began to whiten, as the best of the keen and the bold,
 And thou wert as my youngest brother, and thou didst lead my sons
 When we fared forth over the mountains to meet the arrowy Huns,
 And I smiled to see thee teaching the lore that I learned thee erst.
 O Otter, dost thou remember how the Goth-folk came by the worst,
 And with thee in mine arms I waded the wide shaft-harrowed flood
 That lapped the feet of the mountains with its water blent with blood;
 And how in the hollow places of the mountains hidden away
 We abode the kindreds’ coming as the wet night bideth day?
 Dost thou remember, Otter, how many a joy we had,
 How many a grief remembered has made our high-tide glad?
 O fellow of the hall-glee! O fellow of the field!
 Why then hast thou departed and left me under shield?
 I the ancient, I the childless, while yet in the Laxing hall
 Are thy brother’s sons abiding and their children on thee call.
 “O kindreds of the people! the soul that dwelt herein,
 This goodly way-worn body, was keen for you to win
 Good days and long endurance. Who knoweth of his deed
 What things for you it hath fashioned from the flame of the fire of need?
 But of this at least well wot we, that forth from your hearts it came
 And back to your hearts returneth for the seed of thriving and fame.
 In the ground wherein ye lay it, the body of this man,
 No deed of his abideth, no glory that he wan,
 But evermore the Markmen shall bear his deeds o’er earth,
 With the joy of the deeds that are coming, the garland of his worth.”

He was silent a little as he stood looking down on Otter’s face with grievous sorrow, for all that his words were stout. For indeed, as he had said, Otter had been his battle-fellow and his hall-fellow, though he was much younger than Asmund; and they had been standing foot to foot in that battle wherein old Asmund’s sons were slain by his side.

After a while he turned slowly from looking at Otter to gaze upon Thiodolf, and his body trembled as he looked, and he opened his mouth to speak; but no word came from it; and he sat down upon the edge of the bier, and the tears began to gush out of his old eyes, and he wept aloud. Then they that saw him wondered; for all knew the stoutness of his heart, and how he had borne more burdens than that of eld, and had not cowered down under them. But at last he arose again, and stood firmly on his feet, and faced the folk-mote, and in a voice more like the voice of a man in his prime than of an old man, he sang:

“Wild the storm is abroad
 Of the edge of the sword!
 Far on runneth the path
 Of the war-stride of wrath!
 The Gods hearken and hear
 The long rumour of fear
 From the meadows beneath
 Running fierce o’er the heath,
 Till it beats round their dwelling-place builded aloof
 And at last all up-swelling breaks wild o’er their roof,
 And quencheth their laughter and crieth on all,
 As it rolleth round rafter and beam of the Hall,
 Like the speech of the thunder-cloud tangled on high,
 When the mountain-halls sunder as dread goeth by.

“So they throw the door wide
 Of the Hall where they bide,
 And to murmuring song
 Turns that voice of the wrong,
 And the Gods wait a-gaze
 For that Wearer of Ways:
 For they know he hath gone
 A long journey alone.

Now his feet are they hearkening, and now is he come,
 With his battle-wounds darkening the door of his home,
 Unbyrmed, unshielded, and lonely he stands,
 And the sword that he wielded is gone from his hands—
 Hands outstretched and bearing no spoil of the fight,
 As speechless, unfearing, he stands in their sight.

“War-father gleams
 Where the white light streams
 Round kings of old
 All red with gold,

And the Gods of the name
 With joy aflame.
 All the ancient of men
 Grown glorious again:
 Till the Slains-father crieth aloud at the last:
 'Here is one that beliieth no hope of the past!
 No weapon, no treasure of earth doth he bear,
 No gift for the pleasure of Godhome to share;
 But life his hand bringeth, well cherished, most sweet;
 And hark! the Hall singeth the Folk-wolf to greet!'
 "As the rain of May
 On earth's happiest day,
 So the fair flowers fall
 On the sun-bright Hall
 As the Gods rise up
 With the greeting-cup,
 And the welcoming crowd
 Falls to murmur aloud.
 Then the God of Earth speaketh; sweet-worded he saith,
 'Lo, the Sun ever seeketh Life fashioned of death;
 And to-day as he turneth the wide world about
 On Wolf-stead he yearneth; for there without doubt
 Dwells the death-fashioned story, the flower of all fame.
 Come hither new Glory, come Crown of the Name!'"

All men's hearts rose high as he sang, and when he had ended arose the clang of sword and shield and went ringing down the meadow, and the mighty shout of the Markmen's joy rent the heavens: for in sooth at that moment they saw Thiodolf, their champion, sitting among the Gods on his golden chair, sweet savours around him, and sweet sound of singing, and he himself bright-faced and merry as no man on earth had seen him, for as joyous a man as he was.

But when the sound of their exultation sank down, the Hall-Sun spake again:

"Now wendeth the sun westward, and weary grows the Earth
 Of all the long day's doings in sorrow and in mirth;
 And as the great sun waneth, so doth my candle wane,
 And its flickering flame desireth to rest and die again.
 Therefore across the meadows wend we aback once more
 To the holy Roof of the Wolfings, the shrine of peace and war.
 And these that once have loved us, these warriors images,
 Shall sit amidst our feasting, and see, as the Father sees
 The works that men-folk fashion and the rest of toiling hands,
 When his eyes look down from the mountains and the heavens above all lands,
 And up from the flowery meadows and the rolling deeps of the sea.
 There then at the feast with our champions familiar shall we be
 As oft we are with the Godfolk, when in story-rhymes and lays
 We laugh as we tell of their laughter, and their deeds of other days.
 "Come then, ye sons of the kindreds who hither bore these twain!
 Take up their beds of glory, and fare we home again,
 And feast as men delivered from toil unmeet to bear,
 Who through the night are looking to the dawn-tide fresh and fair
 And the morn and the noon to follow, and the eve and its morrow morn,
 All the life of our deliv'rance and the fair days yet unborn."

So she spoke, and a murmur arose as those valiant men came forth again. But lo, now were they dight in fresh and fair raiment and gleaming war-array. For while all this was a-doing and a-saying, they had gotten them by the Hall-Sun's bidding unto the wains of their Houses, and had arrayed them from the store therein.

So now they took up the biers, and the Hall-Sun led them, and they went over the meadow before the throng of the kindreds, who followed them duly ordered, each House about its banner; and when they were come through the garth which the Romans had made to the Man's-door of the Hall, there were the women of the House freshly attired, who cast flowers on the living men of the host, and on the dead War-dukes, while they wept for pity of them. So went the freemen of the Houses into the Hall, following the Hall-Sun, and the bearers of the War-dukes; but the banners abode without in the garth made by the Romans; and the thralls arrayed a feast for themselves about the wains of the kindreds in the open place before their cots and the smithying booths and the byres.

And as the Hall-Sun went into the Hall, she thrust down the candle against the threshold of the Man's-door, and so quenched it.

Long were the kindreds entering, and when they were under the Roof of the Wolfings, they looked and beheld Thiodolf set in his chair once more, and Otter set beside him; and the

chiefs and leaders of the House took their places on the dais, those to whom it was due, and the Hall-Sun sat under the wondrous Lamp her namesake.

Now was the glooming falling upon the earth; but the Hall was bright within even as the Hall-Sun had promised. Therein was set forth the Treasure of the Wolfings; fair cloths were hung on the walls, goodly broidered garments on the pillars: goodly brazen cauldrons and fair-carven chests were set down in nooks where men could see them well, and vessels of gold and silver were set all up and down the tables of the feast. The pillars also were wreathed with flowers, and flowers hung garlanded from the walls over the precious hangings; sweet gums and spices were burning in fair-wrought censers of brass, and so many candles were alight under the Roof, that scarce had it looked more ablaze when the Romans had litten the faggots therein for its burning amidst the hurry of the Morning Battle.

There then they fell to feasting, hallowing in the high-tide of their return with victory in their hands: and the dead corpses of Thiodolf and Otter, clad in precious glistening raiment, looked down on them from the High-seat, and the kindreds worshipped them and were glad; and they drank the Cup to them before any others, were they Gods or men.

But before the feast was hallowed in, came Ali the son of Grey up to the High-seat, bearing something in his hand: and lo! it was Throng-plough, which he had sought all over the field where the Markmen had been overcome by the Romans, and had found it at last. All men saw him how he held it in his hand now as he went up to the Hall-Sun and spake to her. But she kissed the lad on the forehead, and took Throng-plough, and wound the peace-strings round him and laid him on the board before Thiodolf; and then she spake softly as if to herself, yet so that some heard her:

“O father, no more shalt thou draw Throng-plough from the sheath till the battle is pitched in the last field of fight, and the sons of the fruitful Earth and the sons of Day meet Swart and his children at last, when the change of the World is at hand. Maybe I shall be with thee then: but now and in meanwhile, farewell, O mighty hand of my father!”

Thus then the Houses of the Mark held their High-tide of Returning under the Wolfing Roof with none to blame them or make them afraid: and the moon rose and the summer night wore on towards dawn, and within the Roof and without was there feasting and singing and harping and the voice of abundant joyance: for without the Roof feasted the thralls and the strangers, and the Roman war-captives.

But on the morrow the kindreds laid their dead men in mound betwixt the Great Roof and the Wild-wood. In one mound they laid them with the War-dukes in their midst, and Arinbiorn by Otter’s right side; and Thiodolf bore Throng-plough to mound with him.

But a little way from the mound of their own dead, toward the south they laid the Romans, a great company, with their Captain in the midst: and they heaped a long mound over them not right high; so that as years wore, and the feet of men and beasts trod it down, it seemed a mere swelling of the earth not made by men’s hands; and belike men knew not how many bones of valiant men lay beneath; yet it had a name which endured for long, to wit, the Battle-toft.

But the mound whereunder the Markmen were laid was called Thiodolf’s Howe for many generations of men, and many are the tales told of him; for men were loth to lose him and forget him: and in the latter days men deemed of him that he sits in that Howe not dead but sleeping, with Throng-plough laid before him on the board; and that when the sons of the Goths are at their sorest need and the falcons cease to sit on the ridge of the Great Roof of the Wolfings, he will wake and come forth from the Howe for their helping. But none have dared to break open that Howe and behold what is therein.

But that swelling of the meadow where the Goths had their overthrow at the hands of the Romans, and Thiodolf fell to earth unwounded, got a name also, and was called the Swooning Knowe; and it kept that name long after men had forgotten wherefore it was so called.

Now when all this was done, and the warriors of the kindreds were departed each to his own stead, the Wolfings gathered in wheat-harvest, and set themselves to make good all that the Romans had undone; and they cleansed and mended their Great Roof and made it fairer than before, and took from it all signs of the burning, save that they left the charring and marks of the flames on one tie-beam, the second from the dais, for a token of the past tidings. Also when Harvest was over the Wolfings, the Beamings, the Galtings, and the Elkings, set to work with the Bearings to rebuild their Great Roof and the other dwellings and booths which the Romans had burned; and right fair was that house.

But the Wolfings thrive in field and fold, and they begat children who grew up to be mighty

men and deft of hand, and the House grew more glorious year by year.

The tale tells not that the Romans ever fell on the Mark again; for about this time they began to stay the spreading of their dominion, or even to draw in its boundaries somewhat.

AND THIS IS ALL THAT THE TALE HAS TO TELL CONCERNING THE HOUSE OF THE WOLFINGS AND THE KINDREDS OF THE MARK.

Morris: Roots of the Mountains

CHAPTER I. OF BURGSTEAD AND ITS FOLK AND ITS NEIGHBOURS.

Once upon a time amidst the mountains and hills and falling streams of a fair land there was a town or thorp in a certain valley. This was well-nigh encompassed by a wall of sheer cliffs; toward the East and the great mountains they drew together till they went near to meet, and left but a narrow path on either side of a stony stream that came rattling down into the Dale: toward the river at that end the hills lowered somewhat, though they still ended in sheer rocks; but up from it, and more especially on the north side, they swelled into great shoulders of land, then dipped a little, and rose again into the sides of huge fells clad with pine-woods, and cleft here and there by deep ghylls: thence again they rose higher and steeper, and ever higher till they drew dark and naked out of the woods to meet the snow-fields and ice-rivers of the high mountains. But that was far away from the pass by the little river into the valley; and the said river was no drain from the snow-fields white and thick with the grinding of the ice, but clear and bright were its waters that came from wells amidst the bare rocky heaths.

The upper end of the valley, where it first began to open out from the pass, was rugged and broken by rocks and ridges of water-borne stones, but presently it smoothed itself into mere grassy swellings and knolls, and at last into a fair and fertile plain swelling up into a green wave, as it were, against the rock-wall which encompassed it on all sides save where the river came gushing out of the strait pass at the east end, and where at the west end it poured itself out of the Dale toward the lowlands and the plain of the great river.

Now the valley was some ten miles of our measure from that place of the rocks and the stone-ridges, to where the faces of the hills drew somewhat anigh to the river again at the west, and then fell aback along the edge of the great plain; like as when ye fare a-sailing past two nesses of a river-mouth, and the main-sea lieth open before you.

Besides the river afore-mentioned, which men called the Weltering Water, there were other waters in the Dale. Near the eastern pass, entangled in the rocky ground was a deep tarn full of cold springs and about two acres in measure, and therefrom ran a stream which fell into the Weltering Water amidst the grassy knolls. Black seemed the waters of that tarn which on one side washed the rocks-wall of the Dale; ugly and awful it seemed to men, and none knew what lay beneath its waters save black mis-shapen trouts that few cared to bring to net or angle: and it was called the Death-Tarn.

Other waters yet there were: here and there from the hills on both sides, but especially from the south side, came trickles of water that ran in pretty brooks down to the river; and some of these sprang bubbling up amidst the foot-mounds of the sheer-rocks; some had cleft a rugged and strait way through them, and came tumbling down into the Dale at diverse heights from their faces. But on the north side about halfway down the Dale, one stream somewhat bigger than the others, and dealing with softer ground, had cleft for itself a wider way; and the folk had laboured this way wider yet, till they had made them a road running north along the west side of the stream. Sooth to say, except for the strait pass along the river at the eastern end, and the wider pass at the western, they had no other way (save one of which a word anon) out of the Dale but such as mountain goats and bold cragsmen might take; and even of these but few.

This midway stream was called the Wildlake, and the way along it Wildlake's Way, because it came to them out of the wood, which on that north side stretched away from nigh to the lip of the valley-wall up to the pine woods and the high fells on the east and north, and down to the plain country on the west and south.

Now when the Weltering Water came out of the rocky tangle near the pass, it was turned aside by the ground till it swung right up to the feet of the Southern crags; then it turned and slowly bent round again northward, and at last fairly doubled back on itself before it turned again to run westward; so that when, after its second double, it had come to flowing softly westward under the northern crags, it had cast two thirds of a girdle round about a space of land a little below the grassy knolls and tofts aforesaid; and there in that fair space between the folds of the Weltering Water stood the Thorp whereof the tale hath told.

The men thereof had widened and deepened the Weltering Water about them, and had bridged it over to the plain meads; and athwart the throat of the space left clear by the water they had built them a strong wall though not very high, with a gate amidst and a tower on either side thereof. Moreover, on the face of the cliff which was but a stone's throw from the gate they had made them stairs and ladders to go up by; and on a knoll nigh the brow had built a watch-tower of stone strong and great, lest war should come into the land from over the hills. That tower was ancient, and therefrom the Thorp had its name and the whole valley also; and it was called Burgstead in Burgdale.

So long as the Weltering Water ran straight along by the northern cliffs after it had left Burgstead, betwixt the water and the cliffs was a wide flat way fashioned by man's hand. Thus was the water again a good defence to the Thorp, for it ran slow and deep there, and there was no other ground betwixt it and the cliffs save that road, which was easy to bar across so that no foemen might pass without battle, and this road was called the Portway. For a long mile the river ran under the northern cliffs, and then turned into the midst of the Dale, and went its way westward a broad stream winding in gentle laps and folds here and there down to the out-gate of the Dale. But the Portway held on still underneath the rock-wall, till the sheer-rocks grew somewhat broken, and were cumbered with certain screes, and at last the wayfarer came upon the break in them, and the ghyll through which ran the Wildlake with Wildlake's Way beside it, but the Portway still went on all down the Dale and away to the Plain-country.

That road in the ghyll, which was neither wide nor smooth, the wayfarer into the wood must follow, till it lifted itself out of the ghyll, and left the Wildlake coming rattling down by many steps from the east; and now the way went straight north through the woodland, ever mounting higher, (because the whole set of the land was toward the high fells,) but not in any cleft or ghyll. The wood itself thereabout was thick, a blended growth of diverse kinds of trees, but most of oak and ash; light and air enough came through their boughs to suffer the holly and bramble and eglantine and other small wood to grow together into thickets, which no man could pass without hewing a way. But before it is told whereto Wildlake's Way led, it must be said that on the east side of the ghyll, where it first began just over the Portway, the hill's brow was clear of wood for a certain space, and there, overlooking all the Dale, was the Mote-stead of the Dalesmen, marked out by a great ring of stones, amidst of which was the mound for the Judges and the Altar of the Gods before it. And this was the holy place of the men of the Dale and of other folk whereof the tale shall now tell.

For when Wildlake's Way had gone some three miles from the Mote-stead, the trees began to thin, and presently afterwards was a clearing and the dwellings of men, built of timber as may well be thought. These houses were neither rich nor great, nor was the folk a mighty folk, because they were but a few, albeit body by body they were stout carles enough. They had not affinity with the Dalesmen, and did not wed with them, yet it is to be deemed that they were somewhat akin to them. To be short, though they were freemen, yet as regards the Dalesmen were they well-nigh their servants; for they were but poor in goods, and had to lean upon them somewhat. No tillage they had among those high trees; and of beasts nought save some flocks of goats and a few asses. Hunters they were, and charcoal-burners, and therein the deftest of men, and they could shoot well in the bow withal: so they trucked their charcoal and their smoked venison and their peltries with the Dalesmen for wheat and wine and weapons and weed; and the Dalesmen gave them main good pennyworths, as men who had abundance wherewith to uphold their kinsmen, though they were but far-away kin. Stout hands had these Woodlanders and true hearts as any; but they were few-spoken and to those that needed them not somewhat surly of speech and grim of visage: brown-skinned they were, but light-haired; well-eyed, with but little red in their cheeks: their women were not very fair, for they toiled like the men, or more. They were thought to be wiser than most men in foreseeing things to come. They were much given to spells, and songs of wizardry, and were very mindful of the old story-lays, wherein they were far more wordy than in their daily

speech. Much skill had they in runes, and were exceeding deft in scoring them on treen bowls, and on staves, and door-posts and roof-beams and standing-beds and such like things. Many a day when the snow was drifting over their roofs, and hanging heavy on the tree-boughs, and the wind was roaring through the trees aloft and rattling about the close thicket, when the boughs were clattering in the wind, and crashing down beneath the weight of the gathering freezing snow, when all beasts and men lay close in their lairs, would they sit long hours about the house-fire with the knife or the gouge in hand, with the timber twixt their knees and the whetstone beside them, hearkening to some tale of old times and the days when their banner was abroad in the world; and they the while wheedling into growth out of the tough wood knots and blossoms and leaves and the images of beasts and warriors and women.

They were called nought save the Woodland-Carles in that day, though time had been when they had borne a nobler name: and their abode was called Carlstead. Shortly, for all they had and all they had not, for all they were and all they were not, they were well-beloved by their friends and feared by their foes.

Now when Wildlake's Way was gotten to Carlstead, there was an end of it toward the north; though beyond it in a right line the wood was thinner, because of the hewing of the Carles. But the road itself turned west at once and went on through the wood, till some four miles further it first thinned and then ceased altogether, the ground going down-hill all the way: for this was the lower flank of the first great upheaval toward the high mountains. But presently, after the wood was ended, the land broke into swelling downs and winding dales of no great height or depth, with a few scattered trees about the hillsides, mostly thorns or scrubby oaks, gnarled and bent and kept down by the western wind: here and there also were yew-trees, and whiles the hillsides would be grown over with box-wood, but none very great; and often juniper grew abundantly. This then was the country of the Shepherds, who were friends both of the Dalesmen and the Woodlanders. They dwelt not in any fenced town or thorp, but their homesteads were scattered about as was handy for water and shelter. Nevertheless they had their own stronghold; for amidmost of their country, on the highest of a certain down above a bottom where a willowy stream winded, was a great earthwork: the walls thereof were high and clean and overlapping at the entering in, and amidst of it was a deep well of water, so that it was a very defensible place: and thereto would they drive their flocks and herds when war was in the land, for nought but a very great host might win it; and this stronghold they called Greenbury.

These Shepherd-Folk were strong and tall like the Woodlanders, for they were partly of the same blood, but burnt they were both ruddy and brown: they were of more words than the Woodlanders but yet not many-worded. They knew well all those old story-lays, (and this partly by the minstrelsy of the Woodlanders,) but they had scant skill in wizardry, and would send for the Woodlanders, both men and women, to do whatso they needed therein. They were very hale and long-lived, whereas they dwelt in clear bright air, and they mostly went light-clad even in the winter, so strong and merry were they. They wedded with the Woodlanders and the Dalesmen both; at least certain houses of them did so. They grew no corn; nought but a few pot-herbs, but had their meal of the Dalesmen; and in the summer they drave some of their milch-kine into the Dale for the abundance of grass there; whereas their own hills and bents and winding valleys were not plenteously watered, except here and there as in the bottom under Greenbury. No swine they had, and but few horses, but of sheep very many, and of the best both for their flesh and their wool. Yet were they nought so deft craftsmen at the loom as were the Dalesmen, and their women were not very eager at the weaving, though they loathed not the spindle and rock. Shortly, they were merry folk well-beloved of the Dalesmen, quick to wrath, though it abode not long with them; not very curious in their houses and halls, which were but little, and were decked mostly with the handiwork of the Woodland-Carles their guests; who when they were abiding with them, would oft stand long hours nose to beam, scoring and nicking and hammering, answering no word spoken to them but with aye or no, desiring nought save the endurance of the daylight. Moreover, this shepherd-folk heeded not gay raiment over-much, but commonly went clad in white woollen or sheep-brown weed.

But beyond this shepherd-folk were more downs and more, scantily peopled, and that after a while by folk with whom they had no kinship or affinity, and who were at whiles their foes. Yet was there no enduring enmity between them; and ever after war and battle came peace; and all blood-wites were duly paid and no long feud followed: nor were the Dalesmen and the Woodlanders always in these wars, though at whiles they were. Thus then it fared

with these people.

But now that we have told of the folks with whom the Dalesmen had kinship, affinity, and friendship, tell we of their chief abode, Burgstead to wit, and of its fashion. As hath been told, it lay upon the land made nigh into an isle by the folds of the Weltering Water towards the uppermost end of the Dale; and it was warded by the deep water, and by the wall aforesaid with its towers. Now the Dale at its widest, to wit where Wildlake fell into it, was but nine furlongs over, but at Burgstead it was far narrower; so that betwixt the wall and the wandering stream there was but a space of fifty acres, and therein lay Burgstead in a space of the shape of a sword-pommel: and the houses of the kinships lay about it, amidst of gardens and orchards, but little ordered into streets and lanes, save that a way went clean through everything from the tower-warded gate to the bridge over the Water, which was warded by two other towers on its hither side.

As to the houses, they were some bigger, some smaller, as the housemates needed. Some were old, but not very old, save two only, and some quite new, but of these there were not many: they were all built fairly of stone and lime, with much fair and curious carved work of knots and beasts and men round about the doors; or whiles a wale of such-like work all along the house-front. For as deft as were the Woodlanders with knife and gouge on the oaken beams, even so deft were the Dalesmen with mallet and chisel on the face of the hewn stone; and this was a great pastime about the Thorp. Within these houses had but a hall and solar, with shut-beds out from the hall on one side or two, with whatso of kitchen and buttery and out-bower men deemed handy. Many men dwelt in each house, either kinsfolk, or such as were joined to the kindred.

Near to the gate of Burgstead in that street aforesaid and facing east was the biggest house of the Thorp; it was one of the two abovesaid which were older than any other. Its door-posts and the lintel of the door were carved with knots and twining stems fairer than other houses of that stead; and on the wall beside the door carved over many stones was an image wrought in the likeness of a man with a wide face, which was terrible to behold, although it smiled: he bore a bent bow in his hand with an arrow fitted to its string, and about the head of him was a ring of rays like the beams of the sun, and at his feet was a dragon, which had crept, as it were, from amidst of the blossomed knots of the door-post wherewith the tail of him was yet entwined. And this head with the ring of rays about it was wrought into the adornment of that house, both within and without, in many other places, but on never another house of the Dale; and it was called the House of the Face. Thereof hath the tale much to tell hereafter, but as now it goeth on to tell of the ways of life of the Dalesmen.

In Burgstead was no Mote-hall or Town-house or Church, such as we wot of in these days; and their market-place was wheresoever any might choose to pitch a booth: but for the most part this was done in the wide street betwixt the gate and the bridge. As to a meeting-place, were there any small matters between man and man, these would the Alderman or one of the Wardens deal with, sitting in Court with the neighbours on the wide space just outside the Gate: but if it were to do with greater matters, such as great manslayings and blood-wites, or the making of war or ending of it, or the choosing of the Alderman and the Wardens, such matters must be put off to the Folk-mote, which could but be held in the place aforesaid where was the Doom-ring and the Altar of the Gods; and at that Folk-mote both the Shepherd-Folk and the Woodland-Carles foregathered with the Dalesmen, and duly said their say. There also they held their great casts and made offerings to the Gods for the Fruitfulness of the Year, the ingathering of the increase, and in Memory of their Forefathers. Natheless at Yule-tide also they feasted from house to house to be glad with the rest of Midwinter, and many a cup drank at those feasts to the memory of the fathers, and the days when the world was wider to them, and their banners fared far afield.

But besides these dwellings of men in the field between the wall and the water, there were homesteads up and down the Dale whereso men found it easy and pleasant to dwell: their halls were built of much the same fashion as those within the Thorp; but many had a high garth-wall cast about them, so that they might make a stout defence in their own houses if war came into the Dale.

As to their work afield; in many places the Dale was fair with growth of trees, and especially were there long groves of sweet chestnut standing on the grass, of the fruit whereof the folk had much gain. Also on the south side nigh to the western end was a wood or two of yew-trees very great and old, whence they gat them bow-staves, for the Dalesmen also shot well in the bow. Much wheat and rye they raised in the Dale, and especially at the nether end

thereof. Apples and pears and cherries and plums they had in plenty; of which trees, some grew about the borders of the acres, some in the gardens of the Thorp and the homesteads. On the slopes that had grown from the breaking down here and there of the Northern cliffs, and which faced the South and the Sun's burning, were rows of goodly vines, whereof the folk made them enough and to spare of strong wine both white and red.

As to their beasts; swine they had a many, but not many sheep, since herein they trusted to their trucking with their friends the Shepherds; they had horses, and yet but a few, for they were stout in going afoot; and, had they a journey to make with women big with babes, or with children or outworn elders, they would yoke their oxen to their wains, and go fair and softly whither they would. But the said oxen and all their neat were exceeding big and fair, far other than the little beasts of the Shepherd-Folk; they were either dun of colour, or white with black horns (and those very great) and black tail-tufts and ear-tips. Asses they had, and mules for the paths of the mountains to the east; geese and hens enough, and dogs not a few, great hounds stronger than wolves, sharp-nosed, long-jawed, dun of colour, shag-haired.

As to their wares; they were very deft weavers of wool and flax, and made a shift to dye the thrums in fair colours; since both woad and madder came to them good cheap by means of the merchants of the plain country, and of greening weeds was abundance at hand. Good smiths they were in all the metals: they washed somewhat of gold out of the sands of the Weltering Water, and copper and tin they fetched from the rocks of the eastern mountains; but of silver they saw little, and iron they must buy of the merchants of the plain, who came to them twice in the year, to wit in the spring and the late autumn just before the snows. Their wares they bought with wool spun and in the fleece, and fine cloth, and skins of wine and young neat both steers and heifers, and wrought copper bowls, and gold and copper by weight, for they had no stamped money. And they guested these merchants well, for they loved them, because of the tales they told them of the Plain and its cities, and the manslayings therein, and the fall of Kings and Dukes, and the uprising of Captains.

Thus then lived this folk in much plenty and ease of life, though not delicately nor desiring things out of measure. They wrought with their hands and wearied themselves; and they rested from their toil and feasted and were merry: to-morrow was not a burden to them, nor yesterday a thing which they would fain forget: life shamed them not, nor did death make them afraid.

As for the Dale wherein they dwelt, it was indeed most fair and lovely, and they deemed it the Blessing of the Earth, and they trod its flowery grass beside its rippled streams amidst its green tree-boughs proudly and joyfully with goodly bodies and merry hearts.

CHAPTER II. OF FACE-OF-GOD AND HIS KINDRED.

Tells the tale, that on an evening of late autumn when the weather was fair, calm, and sunny, there came a man out of the wood hard by the Mote-stead aforesaid, who sat him down at the roots of the Speech-mound, casting down before him a roe-buck which he had just slain in the wood. He was a young man of three and twenty summers; he was so clad that he had on him a sheep-brown kirtle and leggings of like stuff bound about with white leather thongs; he bore a short-sword in his girdle and a little axe withal; the sword with fair wrought gilded hilts and a dew-shoe of like fashion to its sheath. He had his quiver at his back and bare in his hand his bow unstrung. He was tall and strong, very fair of fashion both of limbs and face, white-skinned, but for the sun's tanning, and ruddy-cheeked: his beard was little and fine, his hair yellow and curling, cut somewhat close, but for its length so plenteous, and so thick, that none could fail to note it. He had no hat nor hood upon his head, nought but a fillet of golden beads.

As he sat down he glanced at the dale below him with a well-pleased look, and then cast his eyes down to the grass at his feet, as though to hold a little longer all unchanged the image of the fair place he had just seen. The sun was low in the heavens, and his slant beams fell yellow all up the dale, gilding the chestnut groves grown dusk and grey with autumn, and the black masses of the elm-boughs, and gleaming back here and there from the pools of the Weltering Water. Down in the midmost meadows the long-horned dun kine were moving slowly as they fed along the edges of the stream, and a dog was bounding about with exceeding swiftness here and there among them. At a sharply curved bight of the river the man could see a little vermilion flame flickering about, and above it a thin blue veil of smoke hanging in the air, and clinging to the boughs of the willows anear; about it were a dozen menfolk clear to see, some sitting, some standing, some walking to and fro, but all in company together: four of

were brown-clad and short-skirted like himself, and from above the hand of one came a flash of light as the sun smote upon the steel of his spear. The others were long-skirted and clad gayer, and amongst them were red and blue and green and white garments, and they were clear to be seen for women. Just as the young man looked up again, those of them who were sitting down rose up, and those that were strolling drew nigh, and they joined hands together, and fell to dancing on the grass, and the dog and another one with him came up to the dancers and raced about and betwixt them; and so clear to see were they all and so little, being far away, that they looked like dainty well-wrought puppets.

The young man sat smiling at it for a little, and then rose up and shouldered his venison, and went down into Wildlake's Way, and presently was fairly in the Dale and striding along the Portway beside the northern cliffs, whose greyness was gilded yet by the last rays of the sun, though in a minute or two it would go under the western rim. He went fast and cheerily, murmuring to himself snatches of old songs; none overtook him on the road, but he overtook divers folk going alone or in company toward Burgstead; swains and old men, mothers and maidens coming from the field and the acre, or going from house to house; and one or two he met but not many. All these greeted him kindly, and he them again; but he stayed not to speak with any, but went as one in haste.

It was dusk by then he passed under the gate of Burgstead; he went straight thence to the door of the House of the Face, and entered as one who is at home, and need go no further, nor abide a bidding.

The hall he came into straight out of the open air was long and somewhat narrow and not right high; it was well-nigh dark now within, but since he knew where to look, he could see by the flicker that leapt up now and then from the smouldering brands of the hearth amidmost the hall under the luffer, that there were but three men therein, and belike they were even they whom he looked to find there, and for their part they looked for his coming, and knew his step.

He set down his venison on the floor, and cried out in a cheery voice: 'Ho, Kettel! Are all men gone without doors to sleep so near the winter-tide, that the Hall is as dark as a cave? Hither to me! Or art thou also sleeping?'

A voice came from the further side of the hearth: 'Yea, lord, asleep I am, and have been, and dreaming; and in my dream I dealt with the flesh-pots and the cake-board, and thou shalt see my dream come true presently to thy gain.'

Quoth another voice: 'Kettel hath had out that share of his dream already belike, if the saw sayeth sooth about cooks. All ye have been away, so belike he hath done as Rafe's dog when Rafe ran away from the slain buck.'

He laughed therewith, and Kettel with him, and a third voice joined the laughter. The young man also laughed and said: 'Here I bring the venison which my kinsman desired; but as ye see I have brought it over-late: but take it, Kettel. When cometh my father from the stithy?'

Quoth Kettel: 'My lord hath been hard at it shaping the Yule-tide sword, and doth not lightly leave such work, as ye wot, but he will be here presently, for he has sent to bid us dight for supper straightway.'

Said the young man: 'Where are there lords in the dale, Kettel, or hast thou made some thyself, that thou must be always throwing them in my teeth?'

'Son of the Alderman,' said Kettel, 'ye call me Kettel, which is no name of mine, so why should I not call thee lord, which is no dignity of thine, since it goes well over my tongue from old use and wont? But here comes my mate of the kettle, and the women and lads. Sit down by the hearth away from their hurry, and I will fetch thee the hand-water.'

The young man sat down, and Kettel took up the venison and went his ways toward the door at the lower end of the hall; but ere he reached it it opened, and a noisy crowd entered of men, women, boys, and dogs, some bearing great wax candles, some bowls and cups and dishes and trenchers, and some the boards for the meal.

The young man sat quiet smiling and winking his eyes at the sudden flood of light let into the dark place; he took in without looking at this or the other thing the aspect of his Fathers' House, so long familiar to him; yet to-night he had a pleasure in it above his wont, and in all the stir of the household; for the thought of the wood wherein he had wandered all day yet hung heavy upon him. Came one of the girls and cast fresh brands on the smouldering fire and stirred it into a blaze, and the wax candles were set up on the daïs, so that between them

and the mew-quickened fire every corner of the hall was bright. As aforesaid it was long and narrow, over-arched with stone and not right high, the windows high up under the springing of the roof-arch and all on the side toward the street; over against them were the arches of the shut-beds of the housemates. The walls were bare that evening, but folk were wont to hang up hallings of woven pictures thereon when feasts and high-days were toward; and all along the walls were the tenter-hooks for that purpose, and divers weapons and tools were hanging from them here and there. About the dais behind the thwart-table were now stuck for adornment leavy boughs of oak now just beginning to turn with the first frosts. High up on the gable wall above the tenter-hooks for the hangings were carved fair imagery and knots and twining stems; for there in the hewn atone was set forth that same image with the rayed head that was on the outside wall, and he was smiting the dragon and slaying him; but here inside the house all this was stained in fair and lively colours, and the sun-like rays round the head of the image were of beaten gold. At the lower end of the hall were two doors going into the butteries, and kitchen, and other out-bowers; and above these doors was a loft upborne by stone pillars, which loft was the sleeping chamber of the goodman of the house; but the outward door was halfway between the said loft and the hearth of the hall.

So the young man took the shoes from his feet and then sat watching the women and lads arraying the boards, till Kettel came again to him with an old woman bearing the ewer and basin, who washed his feet and poured the water over his hands, and gave him the towel with fair-broidered ends to dry them withal.

Scarce had he made an end of this ere through the outer door came in three men and a young woman with them; the foremost of these was a man younger by some two years than the first-comer, but so like him that none might misdoubt that he was his brother; the next was an old man with a long white beard, but hale and upright; and lastly came a man of middle-age, who led the young woman by the hand. He was taller than the first of the young men, though the other who entered with him outwent him in height; a stark carle he was, broad across the shoulders, thin in the flank, long-armed and big-handed; very noble and well-fashioned of countenance, with a straight nose and grey eyes underneath a broad brow: his hair grown somewhat scanty was done about with a fillet of golden beads like the young men his sons. For indeed this was their father, and the master of the House.

His name was Iron-face, for he was the deftest of weapon-smiths, and he was the Alderman of the Dalesmen, and well-beloved of them; his kindred was deemed the noblest of the Dale, and long had they dwelt in the House of the Face. But of his sons the youngest, the new-comer, was named Hall-face, and his brother the elder Face-of-god; which name was of old use amongst the kindred, and many great men and stout warriors had borne it aforetime: and this young man, in great love had he been gotten, and in much hope had he been reared, and therefore had he been named after the best of the kindred. But his mother, who was hight the Jewel, and had been a very fair woman, was dead now, and Iron-face lacked a wife.

Face-of-god was well-beloved of his kindred and of all the Folk of the Dale, and he had gotten a to-name, and was called Gold-mane because of the abundance and fairness of his hair.

As for the young woman that was led in by Iron-face, she was the betrothed of Face-of-god, and her name was the Bride. She looked with such eyes of love on him when she saw him in the hall, as though she had never seen him before but once, nor loved him but since yesterday; though in truth they had grown up together and had seen each other most days of the year for many years. She was of the kindred with whom the chiefs and great men of the Face mostly wedded, which was indeed far away kindred of them. She was a fair woman and strong: not easily daunted amidst perils she was hardy and handy and light-foot: she could swim as well as any, and could shoot well in the bow, and wield sword and spear: yet was she kind and compassionate, and of great courtesy, and the very dogs and kine trusted in her and loved her. Her hair was dark red of hue, long and fine and plenteous, her eyes great and brown, her brow broad and very fair, her lips fine and red: her cheek not ruddy, yet nowise sallow, but clear and bright: tall she was and of excellent fashion, but well-knit and well-measured rather than slender and wavering as the willow-bough. Her voice was sweet and soft, her words few, but exceeding dear to the listener. In short, she was a woman born to be the ransom of her Folk.

Now as to the names which the menfolk of the Face bore, and they an ancient kindred, a kindred of chieftains, it has been said that in times past their image of the God of the Earth had over his treen face a mask of beaten gold fashioned to the shape of the image; and that

when the Alderman of the Folk died, he to wit who served the God and bore on his arm the gold-ring between the people and the altar, this visor or face of God was laid over the face of him who had been in a manner his priest, and therewith he was borne to mound; and the new Alderman and priest had it in charge to fashion a new visor for the God; and whereas for long this great kindred had been chieftains of the people, they had been, and were all so named, that the word Face was ever a part of their names.

CHAPTER III. THEY TALK OF DIVERS MATTERS IN THE HALL.

Now Face-of-god, who is also called Gold-mane, rose up to meet the new-comers, and each of them greeted him kindly, and the Bride kissed him on the cheek, and he her in likewise; and he looked kindly on her, and took her hand, and went on up the hall to the daïs, following his father and the old man; as for him, he was of the kindred of the House, and was foster-father of Iron-face and of his sons both; and his name was Stone-face: a stark warrior had he been when he was young, and even now he could do a man's work in the battlefield, and his understanding was as good as that of a man in his prime. So went these and four others up on to the daïs and sat down before the thwart-table looking down the hall, for the meat was now on the board; and of the others there were some fifty men and women who were deemed to be of the kindred and sat at the endlong tables.

So then the Alderman stood up and made the sign of the Hammer over the meat, the token of his craft and of his God. Then they fell to with good hearts, for there was enough and to spare of meat and drink. There was bread and flesh (though not Gold-mane's venison), and leeks and roasted chestnuts of the grove, and red-cheeked apples of the garth, and honey enough of that year's gathering, and medlars sharp and mellow: moreover, good wine of the western bents went up and down the hall in great gilded copper bowls and in mazers girt and lipped with gold.

But when they were full of meat, and had drunken somewhat, they fell to speech, and Iron-face spake aloud to his son, who had but been speaking softly to the Bride as one playmate to the other: but the Alderman said: 'Scarce are the wood-deer grown, kinsman, when I must needs eat sheep's flesh on a Thursday, though my son has lain abroad in the woods all night to hunt for me.'

And therewith he smiled in the young man's face; but Gold-mane reddened and said: 'So is it, kinsman, I can hit what I can see; but not what is hidden.'

Iron-face laughed and said: 'Hast thou been to the Woodland-Carles? are their women fairer than our cousins?'

Face-of-god took up the Bride's hand in his and kissed it and laid it to his cheek; and then turned to his father and said: 'Nay, father, I saw not the Wood-carles, nor went to their abode; and on no day do I lust after their women. Moreover, I brought home a roebuck of the fattest; but I was over-late for Kettel, and the flesh was ready for the board by then I came.'

'Well, son,' quoth Iron-face, for he was merry, 'a roebuck is but a little deer for such big men as are thou and I. But I rede thee take the Bride along with thee the next time; and she shall seek whilst thou sleepest, and hit when thou missest.'

Then Face-of-god smiled, but he frowned somewhat also, and he said: 'Well were that, indeed! But if ye must needs drag a true tale out of me: that roebuck I shot at the very edge of the wood nigh to the Mote-stead as I was coming home: harts had I seen in the wood and its lawns, and boars, and bucks, and loosed not at them: for indeed when I awoke in the morning in that wood-lawn ye wot of, I wandered up and down with my bow unbent. So it was that I fared as if I were seeking something, I know not what, that should fill up something lacking to me, I know not what. Thus I felt in myself even so long as I was underneath the black boughs, and there was none beside me and before me, and none to turn aback to: but when I came out again into the sunshine, and I saw the fair dale, and the happy abode lying before me, and folk abroad in the meads merry in the eventide; then was I full fain of it, and loathed the wood as an empty thing that had nought to give me; and lo you! all that I had been longing for in the wood, was it not in this House and ready to my hand?—and that is good meseemeth.'

Therewith he drank of the cup which the Bride put into his hand after she had kissed the rim, but when he had set it down again he spake once more:

'And yet now I am sitting honoured and well-beloved in the House of my Fathers, with the holy hearth sparkling and gleaming down there before me; and she that shall bear my children sitting soft and kind by my side, and the bold lads I shall one day lead in battle drinking out of

my very cup: now it seems to me that amidst all this, the dark cold wood, wherein abide but the beasts and the Foes of the Gods, is bidding me to it and drawing me thither. Narrow is the Dale and the World is wide; I would it were dawn and daylight, that I might be afoot again.'

And he half rose up from his place. But his father bent his brow on him and said: 'Kinsman, thou hast a long tongue for a half-trained whelp: nor see I whitherward thy mind is wandering, but if it be on the road of a lad's desire to go further and fare worse. Harken then, I will offer thee somewhat! Soon shall the West-country merchants be here with their winter truck. How sayest thou? hast thou a mind to fare back with them, and look on the Plain and its Cities, and take and give with the strangers? To whom indeed thou shalt be nothing save a purse with a few lumps of gold in it, or maybe a spear in the stranger's band on the stricken field, or a bow on the wall of an alien city. This is a craft which thou mayst well learn, since thou shalt be a chieftain; a craft good to learn, however grievous it be in the learning. And I myself have been there; for in my youth I desired sore to look on the world beyond the mountains; so I went, and I filled my belly with the fruit of my own desires, and a bitter meat was that; but now that it has passed through me, and I yet alive, belike I am more of a grown man for having endured its gripe. Even so may it well be with thee, son; so go if thou wilt; and thou shalt go with my blessing, and with gold and wares and wain and spearmen.'

'Nay,' said Face-of-god, 'I thank thee, for it is well offered; but I will not go, for I have no lust for the Plain and its Cities; I love the Dale well, and all that is round about it; therein will I live and die.'

Therewith he fell a-musing; and the Bride looked at him anxiously, but spake not. Sooth to say her heart was sinking, as though she foreboded some new thing, which should thrust itself into their merry life.

But the old man Stone-face took up the word and said:

'Son Gold-mane, it behoveth me to speak, since belike I know the wild-wood better than most, and have done for these three-score and ten years; to my cost. Now I perceive that thou longest for the wood and the innermost of it; and wot ye what? This longing will at whiles entangle the sons of our chieftains, though this Alderman that now is hath been free therefrom, which is well for him. For, time was this longing came over me, and I went whither it led me: overlong it were to tell of all that befell me because of it, and how my heart bled thereby. So sorry were the tidings that came of it, that now meseemeth my heart should be of stone and not my face, had it not been for the love wherewith I have loved the sons of the kindred. Therefore, son, it were not ill if ye went west away with the merchants this winter, and learned the dealings of the cities, and brought us back tales thereof.'

But Gold-mane cried out somewhat angrily, 'I tell thee, foster-father, that I have no mind for the cities and their men and their fools and their whores and their runagates. But as for the wood and its wonders, I have done with it, save for hunting there along with others of the Folk. So let thy mind be at ease; and for the rest, I will do what the Alderman commandeth, and whatso my father craveth of me.'

'And that is well, son,' said Stone-face, 'if what ye say come to pass, as sore I misdoubt me it will not. But well it were, well it were! For such things are in the wood, yea and before ye come to its innermost, as may well try the stoutest heart. Therein are Kobbolds, and Wights that love not men, things unto whom the grief of men is as the sound of the fiddle-bow unto us. And there abide the ghosts of those that may not rest; and there wander the dwarfs and the mountain-dwellers, the dealers in marvels, the givers of gifts that destroy Houses; the forgers of the curse that clingeth and the murder that flitteth to and fro. There moreover are the lairs of Wights in the shapes of women, that draw a young man's heart out of his body, and fill up the empty place with desire never to be satisfied, that they may mock him therewith and waste his manhood and destroy him. Nor say I much of the strong-thieves that dwell there, since thou art a valiant sword; or of them who have been made Wolves of the Holy Places; or of the Murder-Carles, the remnants and off-scourings of wicked and wretched Folks—men who think as much of the life of a man as of the life of a fly. Yet happiest is the man whom they shall tear in pieces, than he who shall live burdened by the curse of the Foes of the Gods.'

The housemaster looked on his son as the old carle spake, and a cloud gathered on his face a while; and when Stone-face had made an end he spake:

'This is long and evil talk for the end of a merry day, O fosterer! Wilt thou not drink a draught, O Redesman, and then stand up and set thy fiddle-bow a-dancing, and cause it draw some fair words after it? For my cousin's face hath grown sadder than a young maid's

should be, and my son's eyes gleam with thoughts that are far away from us and abroad in the wild-wood seeking marvels.'

Then arose a man of middle-age from the top of the endlong bench on the east side of the hall: a man tall, thin and scant-haired, with a nose like an eagle's neb: he reached out his hand for the bowl, and when they had given to him he handled it, and raised it aloft and cried:

'Here I drink a double health to Face-of-god and the Bride, and the love that lieth between them, and the love betwixt them twain and us.'

He drank therewith, and the wine went up and down the hall, and all men drank, both carles and queens, with shouting and great joy. Then Redesman put down the cup (for it had come into his hands again), and reached his hand to the wall behind him, and took down his fiddle hanging there in its case, and drew it out and fell to tuning it, while the hall grew silent to hearken: then he handled the bow and laid it on the strings till they wailed and chuckled sweetly, and when the song was well awake and stirring briskly, then he lifted up his voice and sang:

The Minstrel saith:

'O why on this morning, ye maids, are ye tripping
Aloof from the meadows yet fresh with the dew,
Where under the west wind the river is lipping
The fragrance of mint, the white blooms and the blue?
For rough is the Portway where panting ye wander;
On your feet and your gown-hems the dust lieth dun;
Come trip through the grass and the meadow-sweet yonder,
And forget neath the willows the sword of the sun.

The Maidens answer:

Though fair are the moon-daisies down by the river,
And soft is the grass and the white clover sweet;
Though twixt us and the rock-wall the hot glare doth quiver,
And the dust of the wheel-way is dun on our feet;
Yet here on the way shall we walk on this morning
Though the sun burneth here, and sweet, cool is the mead;
For here when in old days the Burg gave its warning,
Stood stark under weapons the doughty of deed.
Here came on the aliens their proud words a-crying,
And here on our threshold they stumbled and fell;
Here silent at even the steel-clad were lying,
And here were our mothers the story to tell.
Here then on the morn of the eve of the wedding
We pray to the Mighty that we too may bear
Such war-walls for warding of orchard and steading,
That the new days be merry as old days were dear.'

Therewith he made an end, and shouts and glad cries arose all about the hall; and an old man arose and cried: 'A cup to the memory of the Mighty of the Day of the Warding of the Ways.' For you must know this song told of a custom of the Folk, held in memory of a time of bygone battle, wherein they had overthrown a great host of aliens on the Portway betwixt the river and the cliffs, two furlongs from the gate of Burgstead. So now two weeks before Midsummer those maidens who were presently to be wedded went early in the morning to that place clad in very fair raiment, swords girt to their sides and spears in their hands, and abode there on the highway from morn till even as though they were a guard to it. And they made merry there, singing songs and telling tales of times past: and at the sunset their grooms came to fetch them away to the Feast of the Eve of the Wedding.

While the song was a-singing Face-of-god took the Bride's hand in his and caressed it, and was soft and blithe with her; and she reddened and trembled for pleasure, and called to mind wedding feasts that had been, and fair brides that she had seen thereat, and she forgot her fears and her heart was at peace again.

And Iron-face looked well-pleased on the two from time to time, and smiled, but forbore words to them.

But up and down the hall men talked with one another about things long ago betid: for their hearts were high and they desired deeds; but in that fair Dale so happy were the years from day to day that there was but little to tell of. So deepened the night and waned, and Gold-mane and the Bride still talked sweetly together, and at whiles kindly to the others; and by seeming he had clean forgotten the wood and its wonders.

Then at last the Alderman called for the cup of good-night, and men drank thereof and went their ways to bed.

CHAPTER IV. FACE-OF-GOD FARETH TO THE WOOD AGAIN.

When it was the earliest morning and dawn was but just beginning, Face-of-god awoke and rose up from his bed, and came forth into the hall naked in his shirt, and stood by the hearth, wherein the piled-up embers were yet red, and looked about and could see nothing stirring in the dimness: then he fetched water and washed the night-tide off him, and clad himself in haste, and was even as he was yesterday, save that he left his bow and quiver in their place and took instead a short casting-spear; moreover he took a leathern scrip and went therewith to the buttery, and set therein bread and flesh and a little gilded beaker; and all this he did with but little noise; for he would not be questioned, lest he should have to answer himself as well as others.

Thus he went quietly out of doors, for the door was but latched, since no bolts or bars or locks were used in Burgstead, and through the town-gate, which stood open, save when rumours of war were about. He turned his face straight towards Wildlake's Way, walking briskly, but at whiles looking back over his shoulder toward the East to note what way was made by the dawning, and how the sky lightened above the mountain passes.

By then he was come to the place where the Maiden Ward was held in the summer the dawn was so far forward that all things had their due colours, and were clear to see in the shadowless day. It was a bright morning, with an easterly air stirring that drove away the haze and dried the meadows, which had otherwise been rimy; for it was cold. Gold-mane lingered on the place a little, and his eyes fell on the road, as dusty yet as in Redesman's song; for the autumn had been very dry, and the strip of green that edged the outside of the way was worn and dusty also. On the edge of it, half in the dusty road, half on the worn grass, was a long twine of briony red-berried and black-leaved; and right in the midst of the road were two twigs of great-leaved sturdy pollard oak, as though they had been thrown aside there yesterday by women or children a-sporting; and the deep white dust yet held the marks of feet, some bare, some shod, crossing each other here and there. Face-of-god smiled as he passed on, as a man with a happy thought; for his mind showed him a picture of the Bride as she would be leading the Maiden Ward next summer, and singing first among the singers, and he saw her as clearly as he had often seen her verily, and before him was the fashion of her hands and all her body, and the little mark on her right wrist, and the place where her arm whitened, because the sleeve guarded it against the sun, which had long been pleasant unto him, and the little hollow in her chin, and the lock of red-brown hair waving in the wind above her brow, and shining in the sun as brightly as the Alderman's cunningest work of golden wire. Soft and sweet seemed that picture, till he almost seemed to hear her sweet voice calling to him, and desire of her so took hold of the youth, that it stirred him up to go swiftness as he strode on, the day brightening behind him.

Now was it nigh sunrise, and he began to meet folk on the way, though not many; since for most their way lay afield, and not towards the Burg. The first was a Woodlander, tall and gaunt, striding beside his ass, whose panniers were laden with charcoal. The carle's daughter, a little maiden of seven winters, riding on the ass's back betwixt the panniers, and prattling to herself in the cold morning; for she was pleased with the clear light in the east, and the smooth wide turf of the meadows, as one who had not often been far from the shadow of the heavy trees of the wood, and their dark wall round about the clearing where they dwelt. Face-of-god gave the twain the sele of the day in merry fashion as he passed them by, and the sober dark-faced man nodded to him but spake no word, and the child stayed her prattle to watch him as he went by.

Then came the sound of the rattle of wheels, and, as he doubled an angle of the rock-wall, he came upon a wain drawn by four dun kine, wherein lay a young woman all muffled up against the cold with furs and cloths; beside the yoke-beasts went her man, a well-knit trim-faced Dalesman clad bravely in holiday raiment, girt with a goodly sword, bearing a bright steel helm on his head, in his hand a long spear with a gay red and white shaft done about with copper bands. He looked merry and proud of his wain-load, and the woman was smiling kindly on him from out of her scarlet and fur; but now she turned a weary happy face on Gold-mane, for they knew him, as did all men of the Dale.

So he stopped when they met, for the goodman had already stayed his slow beasts, and the goodwife had risen a little on her cushions to greet him, yet slowly and but a little, for she was great with child, and not far from her time. That knew Gold-mane well, and what was toward, and why the goodman wore his fine clothes, and why the wain was decked with

oak-boughs and the yoke-beasts with their best gilded bells and copper-adorned harness. For it was a custom with many of the kindreds that the goodwife should fare to her father's house to lie in with her first babe, and the day of her coming home was made a great feast in the house. So then Face-of-god cried out: 'Hail to thee, O Warcliff! Shrewd is the wind this morning, and thou dost well to heed it carefully, this thine orchard, this thy garden, this thy fair apple-tree! To a good hall thou wendest, and the Wine of Increase shall be sweet there this even.'

Then smiled Warcliff all across his face, and the goodwife hung her head and reddened. Said the goodman: 'Wilt thou not be with us, son of the Alderman, as surely thy father shall be?'

'Nay,' said Face-of-god, 'though I were fain of it: my own matters carry me away.'

'What matters?' said Warcliff; 'perchance thou art for the cities this autumn?'

Face-of-god answered somewhat stiffly: 'Nay, I am not;' and then more kindly, and smiling, 'All roads lead not down to the Plain, friend.'

'What road then farest thou away from us?' said the goodwife.

'The way of my will,' he answered.

'And what way is that?' said she; 'take heed, lest I get a longing to know. For then must thou needs tell me, or deal with the carle there beside thee.'

'Nay, goodwife,' said Face-of-god, 'let not that longing take thee; for on that matter I am even as wise as thou. Now good speed to thee and to the new-comer!'

Therewith he went close up to the wain, and reached out his hand to her, and she gave him hers and he kissed it, and so went his ways smiling kindly on them. Then the carle cried to his kine, and they bent down their heads to the yoke; and presently, as he walked on, he heard the rumble of the wain mingling with the tinkling of their bells, which in a little while became measured and musical, and sounded above the creaking of the axles and the rattle of the gear and the roll of the great wheels over the road: and so it grew thinner and thinner till it all died away behind him.

He was now come to where the river turned away from the sheer rock-wall, which was not so high there as in most other places, as there had been in old time long screes from the cliff, which had now grown together, with the waxing of herbs and the washing down of the earth on to them, and made a steady slope or low hill going down riverward. Over this the road lifted itself above the level of the meadows, keeping a little way from the cliffs, while on the other side its bank was somewhat broken and steep here and there. As Face-of-god came up to one of these broken places, the sun rose over the eastern pass, and the meadows grew golden with its long beams. He lingered, and looked back under his hand, and as he did so heard the voices and laughter of women coming up from the slope below him, and presently a young woman came struggling up the broken bank with hand and knee, and cast herself down on the roadside turf laughing and panting. She was a long-limbed light-made woman, dark-faced and black-haired: amidst her laughter she looked up and saw Gold-mane, who had stopped at once when he saw her; she held out her hands to him, and said lightly, though her face flushed withal:

'Come hither, thou, and help the others to climb the bank; for they are beaten in the race, and now must they do after my will; that was the forfeit.'

He went up to her, and took her hands and kissed them, as was the custom of the Dale, and said:

'Hail to thee, Long-coat! who be they, and whither away this morning early?'

She looked hard at him, and fondly belike, as she answered slowly: 'They be the two maidens of my father's house, whom thou knowest; and our errand, all three of us, is to Burgstead, the Feast of the Wine of Increase which shall be drunk this even.'

As she spake came another woman half up the bank, to whom went Face-of-god, and, taking her hands, drew her up while she laughed merrily in his face: he saluted her as he had Long-coat, and then with a laugh turned about to wait for the third; who came indeed, but after a little while, for she had abided, hearing their voices. Her also Gold-mane drew up, and kissed her hands, and she lay on the grass by Long-coat, but the second maiden stood up beside the young man. She was white-skinned and golden-haired, a very fair damsel, whereas the last-comer was but comely, as were well-nigh all the women of the Dale.

Said Face-of-god, looking on the three: 'How comes it, maidens, that ye are but in your kirtles this sharp autumn morning? or where have ye left your gowns or your cloaks?'

For indeed they were clad but in close-fitting blue kirtles of fine wool, embroidered about the hems with gold and coloured threads.

The last-comer laughed and said: 'What ails thee, Gold-mane, to be so careful of us, as if thou wert our mother or our nurse? Yet if thou must needs know, there hang our gowns on the thorn-bush down yonder; for we have been running a match and a forfeit; to wit, that she who was last on the highway should go down again and bring them up all three; and now that is my day's work: but since thou art here, Alderman's son, thou shalt go down instead of me and fetch them up.'

But he laughed merrily and outright, and said: 'That will I not, for there be but twenty-four hours in the day, and what between eating and drinking and talking to fair maidens, I have enough to do in every one of them. Wasteful are ye women, and simple is your forfeit. Now will I, who am the Alderman's son, give forth a doom, and will ordain that one of you fetch up the gowns yourselves, and that Long-coat be the one; for she is the fleetest-footed and ablest thereto. Will ye take my doom? for later on I shall not be wiser.'

'Yea,' said the fair woman, 'not because thou art the Alderman's son, but because thou art the fairest man of the Dale, and mayst bid us poor souls what thou wilt.'

Face-of-god reddened at her words, and the speaker and the last-comer laughed; but Long-coat held her peace: she cast one very sober look on him, and then ran lightly down the bent; he drew near the edge of it, and watched her going; for her light-foot slimness was fair to look on: and he noted that when she was nigh the thorn-bush whereon hung the bright-broidered gowns, and deemed belike that she was not seen, she kissed both her hands where he had kissed them erst.

Thereat he drew aback and turned away shyly, scarce looking at the other twain, who smiled on him with somewhat jeering looks; but he bade them farewell and departed speedily; and if they spoke, it was but softly, for he heard their voices no more.

He went on under the sunlight which was now gilding the outstanding stones of the cliffs, and still his mind was set upon the Bride; and his meeting with the mother of the yet unborn baby, and with the three women with their freshness and fairness, did somehow turn his thought the more upon her, since she was the woman who was to be his amongst all women, for she was far fairer than any one of them; and through all manner of life and through all kinds of deeds would he be with her, and know more of her fairness and kindness than any other could: and him-seemed he could see pictures of her and of him amidst all these deeds and ways.

Now he went very swiftly; for he was eager, though he knew not for what, and he thought but little of the things on which his eyes fell. He met none else on the road till he was come to Wildlake's Way, though he saw folk enough down in the meadows; he was soon amidst the first of the trees, and without making any stay set his face east and somewhat north, that is, toward the slopes that led to the great mountains. He said to himself aloud, as he wended the wood: 'Strange! yestereven I thought much of the wood, and I set my mind on not going thither, and this morning I thought nothing of it, and here am I amidst its trees, and wending towards its innermost.'

His way was easy at first, because the wood for a little space was all of beech, so that there was no undergrowth, and he went lightly betwixt the tall grey and smooth boles; albeit his heart was nought so gay as it was in the dale amidst the sunshine. After a while the beech-wood grew thinner, and at last gave out altogether, and he came into a space of rough broken ground with nought but a few scrubby oaks and thorn-bushes growing thereon here and there. The sun was high in the heavens now, and shone brightly down on the waste, though there were a few white clouds high up above him. The rabbits scuttled out of the grass before him; here and there he turned aside from a stone on which lay coiled an adder sunning itself; now and again both hart and hind bounded away from before him, or a sounder of wild swine ran grunting away toward closer covert. But nought did he see but the common sights and sounds of the woodland; nor did he look for aught else, for he knew this part of the woodland indifferent well.

He held on over this treeless waste for an hour or more, when the ground began to be less rugged, and he came upon trees again, but thinly scattered, oak and ash and hornbeam not right great, with thickets of holly and blackthorn between them. The set of the ground was still steadily up to the east and north-east, and he followed it as one who wendeth an assured way. At last before him seemed to rise a wall of trees and thicket; but when he drew near

to it, lo! an opening in a certain place, and a little path as if men were wont to thread the tangle of the wood thereby; though hitherto he had noted no slot of men, nor any sign of them, since he had plunged into the deep of the beech-wood. He took the path as one who needs must, and went his ways as it led. In sooth it was well-nigh blind, but he was a deft woodsman, and by means of it skirted many a close thicket that had otherwise stayed him. So on he went, and though the boughs were close enough overhead, and the sun came through but in flecks, he judged that it was growing towards noon, and he wotted well that he was growing aweary. For he had been long afoot, and the more part of the time on a rough way, or breasting a slope which was at whiles steep enough.

At last the track led him skirting about an exceeding close thicket into a small clearing, through which ran a little woodland rill amidst rushes and dead leaves: there was a low mound near the eastern side of this wood-lawn, as though there had been once a dwelling of man there, but no other sign or slot of man was there.

So Face-of-god made stay in that place, casting himself down beside the rill to rest him and eat and drink somewhat. Whatever thoughts had been with him through the wood (and they been many) concerning his House and his name, and his father, and the journey he might make to the cities of the Westland, and what was to befall him when he was wedded, and what war or trouble should be on his hands—all this was now mingled together and confused by this rest amidst his weariness. He laid down his scrip, and drew his meat from it and ate what he would, and dipping his gilded beaker into the brook, drank water smacking of the damp musty savour of the woodland; and then his head sank back on a little mound in the short turf, and he fell asleep at once. A long dream he had in short space; and therein were blent his thoughts of the morning with the deeds of yesterday; and other matters long forgotten in his waking hours came back to his slumber in unordered confusion: all which made up for him pictures clear, but of little meaning, save that, as oft befalls in dreams, whatever he was a-doing he felt himself belated.

When he awoke, smiling at something strange in his gone-by dream, he looked up to the heavens, thinking to see signs of the even at hand, for he seemed to have been dreaming so long. The sky was thinly overcast by now, but by his wonted woodcraft he knew the whereabouts of the sun, and that it was scant an hour after noon. He sat there till he was wholly awake, and then drank once more of the woodland water; and he said to himself, but out loud, for he was fain of the sound of a man's voice, though it were but his own:

'What is mine errand hither? Whither wend I? What shall I have done to-morrow that I have hitherto left undone? Or what manner of man shall I be then other than I am now?'

Yet though he said the words he failed to think the thought, or it left him in a moment of time, and he thought but of the Bride and her kindness. Yet that abode with him but a moment, and again he saw himself and those two women on the highway edge, and Long-coat lingering on the slope below, kissing his kisses on her hands; and he was sorry that she desired him over-much, for she was a fair woman and a friendly. But all that also flowed from him at once, and he had no thought in him but that he also desired something that he lacked: and this was a burden to him, and he rose up frowning, and said to himself, 'Am I become a mere sport of dreams, whether I sleep or wake? I will go backward—or forward, but will think no more.'

Then he ordered his gear again, and took the path onward and upward toward the Great Mountains; and the track was even fainter than before for a while, so that he had to seek his way diligently.

CHAPTER V. FACE-OF-GOD FALLS IN WITH MENFOLK ON THE MOUNTAIN.

Now he plodded on steadily, and for a long time the forest changed but little, and of wild things he saw only a few of those that love the closest covert. The ground still went up and up, though at whiles were hollows, and steeper bents out of them again, and the half-blind path or slot still led past the close thickets and fallen trees, and he made way without let or hindrance. At last once more the wood began to thin, and the trees themselves to be smaller and gnarled and ill-grown: therewithal the day was waning, and the sky was quite clear again as the afternoon grew into a fair autumn evening.

Now the trees failed altogether, and the slope grown steeper was covered with heather and ling; and looking up, he saw before him quite near by seeming in the clear even (though indeed

they were yet far away) the snowy peaks flushed with the sinking sun against the frosty dark-grey eastern sky; and below them the dark rock-mountains, and below these again, and nigh to him indeed, the fells covered with pine-woods and looking like a wall to the heaths he trod.

He stayed a little while and turned his head to look at the way whereby he had come; but that way a swell of the oak-forest hid everything but the wood itself, making a wall behind him as the pine-wood made a wall before. There came across him then a sharp memory of the boding words which Stone-face had spoken last night, and he felt as if he were now indeed within the trap. But presently he laughed and said: 'I am a fool: this comes of being alone in the dark wood and the dismal waste, after the merry faces of the Dale had swept away my foolish musings of yesterday and the day before. Lo! here I stand, a man of the Face, sword and axe by my side; if death come, it can but come once; and if I fear not death, what shall make me afraid? The Gods hate me not, and will not hurt me; and they are not ugly, but beauteous.'

Therewith he strode on again, and soon came to a place where the ground sank into a shallow valley and the ling gave place to grass for a while, and there were tall old pines scattered about, and betwixt them grey rocks; this he passed through, climbing a steep bent out of it, and the pines were all about him now, though growing wide apart, till at last he came to where they thickened into a wood, not very close, wherethrough he went merrily, singing to himself and swinging his spear. He was soon through this wood, and came on to a wide well-grassed wood-lawn, hedged by the wood aforesaid on three sides, but sloping up slowly toward the black wall of the thicker pine-wood on the fourth side, and about half a furlong overthwart and endlong. The sun had set while he was in the last wood, but it was still broad daylight on the wood-lawn, and as he stood there he was ware of a house under the pine-wood on the other side, built long and low, much like the houses of the Woodland-Carles, but rougher fashioned and of unhewn trees. He gazed on it, and said aloud to himself as his wont was:

'Marvellous! here is a dwelling of man, scarce a day's journey from Burgstead; yet have I never heard tell of it: may happen some of the Woodland-Carles have built it, and are on some errand of hunting peltries up in the mountains, or maybe are seeking copper and tin among the rocks. Well, at least let us go see what manner of men dwell there, and if they are minded for a guest to-night; for fain were I of a bed beneath a roof, and of a board with strong meat and drink on it.'

Therewith he set forward, not heeding much that the wood he had passed through was hard on his left hand; but he had gone but twenty paces when he saw a red thing at the edge of the wood, and then a glitter, and a spear came whistling forth, and smote his own spear so hard close to the steel that it flew out of his hand; then came a great shout, and a man clad in a scarlet kirtle ran forth on him. Face-of-god had his axe in his hand in a twinkling, and ran at once to meet his foe; but the man had the hill on his side as he rushed on with a short-sword in his hand. Axe and sword clashed together for a moment of time, and then both the men rolled over on the grass together, and Face-of-god as he fell deemed that he heard the shrill cry of a woman. Now Face-of-god found that he was the nethermost, for if he was strong, yet was his foe stronger; the axe had flown out of his hand also, while the strange man still kept a hold of his short-sword; and presently, though he still struggled all he could, he saw the man draw back his hand to smite with the said sword; and at that nick of time the foeman's knee was on his breast, his left hand was doubled back behind him, and his right wrist was gripped hard in the stranger's left hand. Even therewith his ears, sharpened by the coming death, heard the sound of footsteps and fluttering raiment drawing near; something dark came between him and the sky; there was the sound of a great stroke, and the big man loosened his grip and fell off him to one side.

Face-of-god leapt up and ran to his axe and got hold of it; but turning round found himself face to face with a tall woman holding in her hand a stout staff like the limb of a tree. She was calm and smiling, though forsooth it was she who had stricken the stroke and stayed the sword from his throat. His hand and axe dropped down to his side when he saw what it was that faced him, and that the woman was young and fair; so he spake to her and said:

'What aileth, maiden? is this man thy foe? doth he oppress thee? shall I slay him?'

She laughed and said: 'Thou art open-handed in thy proffers: he might have asked the like concerning thee but a minute ago.'

'Yea, yea,' said Gold-mane, laughing also, 'but he asked it not of thee.'

'That is sooth,' she said, 'but since thou hast asked me, I will tell thee that if thou slay him

it will be my harm as well as his; and in my country a man that taketh a gift is not wont to break the giver's head with it straightway. The man is my brother, O stranger, and presently, if thou wilt, thou mayst be eating at the same board with him. Or if thou wilt, thou mayst go thy ways unhurt into the wood. But I had liefer of the twain that thou wert in our house to-night; for thou hast a wrong against us.'

Her voice was sweet and clear, and she spake the last words kindly, and drew somewhat nigher to Gold-mane. Therewithal the smitten man sat up, and put his hand to his head, and quoth he:

'Angry is my sister! good it is to wear the helm abroad when she shaketh the nut-trees.'

'Nay,' said she, 'it is thy luck that thou wert bare-headed, else had I been forced to smite thee on the face. Thou churl, since when hath it been our wont to thrust knives into a guest, who is come of great kin, a man of gentle heart and fair face? Come hither and handsel him self-doom for thy fool's onset!'

The man rose to his feet and said: 'Well, sister, least said, soonest mended. A clout on the head is worse than a woman's chiding; but since ye have given me one, ye may forbear the other.'

Therewith he drew near to them. He was a very big-made man, most stalwarth, with dark red hair and a thin pointed beard; his nose was straight and fine, his eyes grey and well-opened, but somewhat fierce withal. Yet was he in nowise evil-looking; he seemed some thirty summers old. He was clad in a short scarlet kirtle, a goodly garment, with a hood of like web pulled off his head on to his shoulders: he bore a great gold ring on his left arm, and a collar of gold came down on to his breast from under his hood.

As for the woman, she was clad in a long white linen smock, and over it a short gown of dark blue woollen, and she had skin shoes on her feet.

Now the man came up to Face-of-god, and took his hand and said: 'I deemed thee a foe, and I may not have over-many foes alive: but it seems that thou art to be a friend, and that is well and better; so herewith I handsel thee self-doom in the matter of the onslaught.'

Then Face-of-god laughed and said: 'The doom is soon given forth; against the tumble on the grass I set the clout on the head; there is nought left over to pay to any man's son.'

Said the scarlet-clad man: 'Belike by thine eyes thou art a true man, and wilt not betray me. Now is there no foeman here, but rather maybe a friend both now and in time to come.' Therewith he cast his arms about Face-of-god and kissed him. But Face-of-god turned about to the woman and said: 'Is the peace wholly made?'

She shook her head and said soberly: 'Nay, thou art too fair for a woman to kiss.'

He flushed red, as his wont was when a woman praised him; yet was his heart full of pleasure and well-liking. But she laid her hand on his shoulder and said: 'Now is it for thee to choose betwixt the wild-wood and the hall, and whether thou wilt be a guest or a wayfarer this night.'

As she touched him there took hold of him a sweetness of pleasure he had never felt erst, and he answered: 'I will be thy guest and not thy stranger.'

'Come then,' she said, and took his hand in hers, so that he scarce felt the earth under his feet, as they went all three together toward the house in the gathering dusk, while eastward where the peaks of the great mountains dipped was a light that told of the rising of the moon.

CHAPTER VI. OF FACE-OF-GOD AND THOSE MOUNTAIN-DWELLERS.

A yard or two from the threshold Gold-mane hung back a moment, entangled in some such misgiving as a man is wont to feel when he is just about to do some new deed, but is not yet deep in the story; his new friends noted that, for they smiled each in their own way, and the woman drew her hand away from his. Face-of-god held out his still as though to take hers again, and therewithal he changed countenance and said as though he had stayed but to ask that question:

'Tell me thy name, tall man; and thou, fair woman, tell me thine; for how can we talk together else?'

The man laughed outright and said: 'The young chieftain thinks that this house also should be his! Nay, young man, I know what is in thy thought, be not ashamed that thou art wary; and be assured! We shall hurt thee no more than thou hast been hurt. Now as to my name; the name that was born with me is gone: the name that was given me hath been taken from

me: now I belike must give myself a name, and that shall be Wild-wearer; but it may be that thou thyself shalt one day give me another, and call me Guest.'

His sister gazed at him solemnly as he spoke, and Face-of-god beholding her the while, deemed that her beauty grew and grew till she seemed as awful as a Goddess; and into his mind it came that this over-strong man and over-lovely woman were nought mortal, and they withal dealing with him as father and mother deal with a wayward child: then for a moment his heart failed him, and he longed for the peace of Burgdale, and even the lonely wood. But therewith she turned to him and let her hand come into his again, and looked kindly on him and said: 'And as for me, call me the Friend; the name is good and will serve for many things.'

He looked down from her face and his eyes lighted on her hand, and when he noted even amid the evening dusk how fair and lovely it was fashioned, and yet as though it were deft in the crafts that the daughters of menfolk use, his fear departed, and the pleasure of his longing filled his heart, and he drew her hand to him to kiss it; but she held it back. Then he said: 'It is the custom of the Dale to all women.'

So she let him kiss her hand, heeding the kiss nothing, and said soberly:

'Then art thou of Burgdale, and if it were lawful to guess, I would say that thy name is Face-of-god, of the House of the Face.'

'Even so it is,' said he, 'but in the Dale those that love me do mostly call me Gold-mane.'

'It is well named,' she said, 'and seldom wilt thou be called otherwise, for thou wilt be well-beloved. But come in now, Gold-mane, for night is at hand, and here have we meat and lodging such as an hungry and weary man may take; though we be broken people, dwellers in the waste.'

Therewith she led him gently over the threshold into the hall, and it seemed to him as if she were the fairest and the noblest of all the Queens of ancient story.

When he was in the house he looked and saw that, rough as it was without it lacked not fairness within. The floor was of hard-trodden earth strewn with pine-twigs, and with here and there brown bearskins laid on it: there was a standing table near the upper end athwart the hall, and a days beyond that, but no endlong table. Gold-mane looked to the shut-beds, and saw that they were large and fair, though there were but a few of them; and at the lower end was a loft for a sleeping chamber dight very fairly with brodered cloths. The hangings on the walls, though they left some places bare which were hung with fresh boughs, were fairer than any he had ever seen, so that he deemed that they must come from far countries and the City of Cities: therein were images wrought of warriors and fair women of old time and their dealings with the Gods and the Giants, and Wondrous wights; and he deemed that this was the story of some great kindred, and that their token and the sign of their banner must needs be the Wood-wolf, for everywhere was it wrought in these pictured webs. Perforce he looked long and earnestly at these fair things, for the hall was not dark yet, because the brands on the hearth were flaming their last, and when Wild-wearer beheld him so gazing, he stood up and looked too for a moment, and then smote his right hand on the hilt of his sword, and turned away and strode up and down the hall as one in angry thought.

But the woman, even the Friend, bestirred herself for the service of the guest, and brought water for his hands and feet, and when she had washed him, bore him the wine of Welcome and drank to him and bade him drink; and he all the while was shamefaced; for it was to him as if one of the Ladies of the Heavenly Burg were doing him service. Then she went away by a door at the lower end of the hall, and Wild-wearer came and sat down by Gold-mane, and fell a-talking with him about the ways of the Dalesmen, and their garths, and the pastures and growths thereof; and what temper the carles themselves were of; which were good men, which were ill, which was loved and which scorned; no otherwise than if he had been the goodman of some neighbouring dale; and Gold-mane told him whatso he knew, for he saw no harm therein.

After a while the outer door opened, and there came in a woman of some five-and-twenty winters, trimly and strongly built; short-skirted she was and clad as a hunter, with a bow in her hand and a quiver at her back: she unslung a pouch, which she emptied at Wild-wearer's feet of a leash of hares and two brace of mountain grouse; of Face-of-god she took but little heed.

Said Wild-wearer: 'This is good for to-morrow, not for to-day; the meat is well-nigh on the board.'

Then Gold-mane smiled, for he called to mind his home-coming of yesterday. But the

woman said:

‘The fault is not mine; she told me of the coming guest but three hours ago.’

‘Ay?’ said Wild-wearer, ‘she looked for a guest then?’

‘Yea, certes,’ said the woman, ‘else why went I forth this afternoon, as wearied as I was with yesterday?’

‘Well, well,’ said Wild-wearer, ‘get to thy due work or go play; I meddle not with meat! and for thee all jests are as bitter earnest.’

‘And with thee, chief,’ she said, ‘it is no otherwise; surely I am made on thy model.’

‘Thy tongue is longer, friend,’ said he; ‘now tarry if thou wilt, and if the supper’s service craveth thee not.’

She turned away with one keen look at Face-of-god, and departed through the door at the lower end of the hall.

By this time the hall was dusk, for there were no candles there, and the hearth-fire was but smouldering. Wild-wearer sat silent and musing now, and Face-of-god spake not, for he was deep in wild and happy dreams. At last the lower door opened and the fair woman came into the hall with a torch in either hand, after whom came the huntress, now clad in a dark blue kirtle, and an old woman yet straight and hale; and these twain bore in the victuals and the table-gear. Then the three fell toighting the board, and when it was all ready, and Gold-mane and Wild-wearer were set down to it, and with them the fair woman and the huntress, the old woman threw good store of fresh brands on the hearth, so that the light shone into every corner; and even therewith the outer door opened, and four more men entered, whereof one was old, but big and stalwarth, the other three young; they were all clad roughly in sheep-brown weed, but had helms upon their heads and spears in their hands and great swords girt to their sides; and they seemed doughty men and ready for battle. One of the young men cast down by the door the carcass of a big-horned mountain sheep, and then they all trooped off to the out-bower by the lower door, and came back presently fairly clad and without their weapons. Wild-wearer nodded to them kindly, and they sat at table paying no more heed to Face-of-god than to cast him a nod for salutation.

Then said the old woman to them: ‘Well, lads, have ye been doing or sleeping?’

‘Sleeping, mother,’ said one of the young men, ‘as was but due after last night was, and to-morrow shall be.’

Said the huntress: ‘Hold thy peace, Wood-wise, and let thy tongue help thy teeth to deal with thy meat; for this is not the talking hour.’

‘Nay, Bow-may,’ said another of the swains, ‘since here is a new man, now is the time to talk to him.’

Said the huntress: ‘Tis thine hands that talk best, Wood-wont; it is not they that shall bring thee to shame.’

Spake the third: ‘What have we to do with shame here, far away from dooms and doomers, and elders, and wardens, and guarded castles? If the new man listeth to speak, let him speak; or to fight, then let him; it shall ever be man to man.’

Then spake the old woman: ‘Son Wood-wicked, hold thy peace, and forget the steel that ever eggeth thee on to draw.’

Therewith she set the last matters on the board, while the three swains sat and eyed Gold-mane somewhat fiercely, now that words had stirred them, and he had sat there saying nothing, as one who was better than they, and contemned them; but now spake Wild-wearer:

‘Whoso hungreth let him eat! Whoso would slumber, let him to bed. But he who would bicker, it must needs be with me. Here is a man of the Dale, who hath sought the wood in peace, and hath found us. His hand is ready and his heart is guileless: if ye fear him, run away to the wood, and come back when he is gone; but none shall mock him while I sit by: now, lads, be merry and blithe with the guest.’

Then the young men greeted Gold-mane, and the old man said: ‘Art thou of Burgstead? then wilt thou be of the House of the Face, and thy name will be Face-of-god; for that man is called the fairest of the Dale, and there shall be none fairer than thou.’

Face-of-god laughed and said: ‘There be but few mirrors in Burgdale, and I have no mind to journey west to the cities to see what manner of man I be: that were ill husbandry. But now I have heard the names of the three swains, tell me thy name, father!’

Spake the huntress: 'This is my father's brother, and his name is Wood-father; or ye shall call him so: and I am called Bow-may because I shoot well in the bow: and this old carline is my eme's wife, and now belike my mother, if I need one. But thou, fair-faced Dalesman, little dost thou need a mirror in the Dale so long as women abide there; for their faces shall be instead of mirrors to tell thee whether thou be fair and lovely.'

Thereat they all laughed and fell to their victual, which was abundant, of wood-venison and mountain-fowl, but of bread was no great plenty; wine lacked not, and that of the best; and Gold-mane noted that the cups and the apparel of the horns and mazers were not of gold nor gilded copper, but of silver; and he marvelled thereat, for in the Dale silver was rare.

So they ate and drank, and Gold-mane looked ever on the Friend, and spake much with her, and he deemed her friendly indeed, and she seemed most pleased when he spoke best, and led him on to do so. Wild-wearer was but of few words, and those somewhat harsh; yet was he as a man striving to be courteous and blithe; but of the others Bow-may was the greatest speaker.

Wild-wearer called healths to the Sun, and the Moon, and the Hosts of Heaven; to the Gods of the Earth; to the Woodwights; and to the Guest. Other healths also he called, the meaning of which was dark to Gold-mane; to wit, the Jaws of the Wolf; the Silver Arm; the Red Hand; the Golden Bushel; and the Ragged Sword. But when he asked the Friend concerning these names what they might signify, she shook her head and answered not.

At last Wild-wearer cried out: 'Now, lads, the night weareth and the guest is weary: therefore whoso of you hath in him any minstrelsy, now let him make it, for later on it shall be over-late.'

Then arose Wood-wont and went to his shut-bed and groped therein, and took from out of it a fiddle in its case; and he opened the case and drew from it a very goodly fiddle, and he stood on the floor amidst of the hall and Bow-may his cousin with him; and he laid his bow on the fiddle and woke up song in it, and when it was well awake she fell a-singing, and he to answering her song, and at the last all they of the house sang together; and this is the meaning of the words which they sang:

She singeth.

Now is the rain upon the day,
And every water's wide;
Why busk ye then to wear the way,
And whither will ye ride?

He singeth.

Our kine are on the eyot still,
The eddies lap them round;
All dykes the wind-worn waters fill,
And waneth grass and ground.

She singeth.

O ride ye to the river's brim
In war-weed fair to see?
Or winter waters will ye swim
In hauberks to the knee?

He singeth.

Wild is the day, and dim with rain,
Our sheep are warded ill;
The wood-wolves gather for the plain,
Their ravening maws to fill.

She singeth.

Nay, what is this, and what have ye,
A hunter's band, to bear
The Banner of our Battle-glee
The skulking wolves to scare?

He singeth.

O women, when we wend our ways
To deal with death and dread,
The Banner of our Fathers' Days
Must flap the wind o'erhead.

She singeth.

Ah, for the maidens that ye leave!
 Who now shall save the hay?
 What grooms shall kiss our lips at eve,
 When June hath mastered May?

He singeth.

The wheat is won, the seed is sown,
 Here toileth many a maid,
 And ere the hay knee-deep hath grown
 Your grooms the grass shall wade.

They sing all together.

Then fair befall the mountain-side
 Whereon the play shall be!
 And fair befall the summer-tide
 That whoso lives shall see.

Face-of-god thought the song goodly, but to the others it was well known. Then said Wood-father:

‘O foster-son, thy foster-brother hath sung well for a wood abider; but we are deeming that his singing shall be but as a starling to a throstle matched against thy new-come guest. Therefore, Dalesman, sing us a song of the Dale, and if ye will, let it be of gardens and pleasant houses of stone, and fair damsels therein, and swains with them who toil not over-much for a scant livelihood, as do they of the waste, whose heads may not be seen in the Holy Places.’

Said Gold-mane: ‘Father, it is ill to set the words of a lonely man afar from his kin against the song that cometh from the heart of a noble house; yet may I not gainsay thee, but will sing to thee what I may call to mind, and it is called the Song of the Ford.’

Therewith he sang in a sweet and clear voice: and this is the meaning of his words:

In hay-tide, through the day new-born,
 Across the meads we come;
 Our hauberks brush the blossomed corn
 A furlong short of home.
 Ere yet the gables we behold
 Forth flasheth the red sun,
 And smites our fallow helms and cold
 Though all the fight be done.
 In this last mend of mowing-grass
 Sweet doth the clover smell,
 Crushed neath our feet red with the pass
 Where hell was blent with hell.
 And now the willowy stream is nigh,
 Down wend we to the ford;
 No shafts across its fishes fly,
 Nor flasheth there a sword.
 But lo! what gleameth on the bank
 Across the water wan,
 As when our blood the mouse-ear drank
 And red the river ran?
 Nay, hasten to the ripple clear,
 Look at the grass beyond!
 Lo ye the dainty band and dear
 Of maidens fair and fond!
 Lo how they needs must take the stream!
 The water hides their feet;
 On fair kind arms the gold doth gleam,
 And midst the ford we meet.
 Up through the garden two and two,
 And on the flowers we drip;
 Their wet feet kiss the morning dew
 As lip lies close to lip.
 Here now we sing; here now we stay:
 By these grey walls we tell
 The love that lived from out the fray,
 The love that fought and fell.

When he was done they all said that he had sung well, and that the song was sweet. Yet did Wild-wearer smile somewhat; and Bow-may said outright: ‘Soft is the song, and hath been made by lads and minstrels rather than by warriors.’

‘Nay, kinswoman,’ said Wood-father, ‘thou art hard to please; the guest is kind, and hath given us that I asked for, and I give him all thanks therefor.’

Face-of-god smiled, but he heeded little what they said, for as he sang he had noted that the Friend looked kindly on him; and he thought he saw that once or twice she put out her hand as if to touch him, but drew it back again each time. She spake after a little and said:

‘Here now hath been a stream of song running betwixt the Mountain and the Dale even as doth a river; and this is good to come between our dreams of what hath been and what shall be.’ Then she turned to Gold-mane, and said to him scarce loud enough for all to hear:

‘Herewith I bid thee good-night, O Dalesman; and this other word I have to thee: heed not what befalleth in the night, but sleep thy best, for nought shall be to thy scathe. And when thou wakest in the morning, if we are yet here, it is well; but if we are not, then abide us no long while, but break thy fast on the victual thou wilt find upon the board, and so depart and go thy ways home. And yet thou mayst look to it to see us again before thou diest.’

Therewith she held out her hand to him, and he took it and kissed it; and she went to her chamber-aloft at the lower end of the hall. And when she was gone, once more he had a deeming of her that she was of the kindred of the Gods. At her departure him-seemed that the hall grew dull and small and smoky, and the night seemed long to him and doubtful the coming of the day.

CHAPTER VII. FACE-OF-GOD TALKETH WITH THE FRIEND ON THE MOUNTAIN.

So now went all men to bed; and Face-to-god’s shut-bed was over against the outer door and toward the lower end of the hall, and on the panel about it hung the weapons and shields of men. Fair was that chamber and roomy, and the man was weary despite his eagerness, so that he went to sleep as soon as his head touched the pillow; but within a while (he deemed about two hours after midnight) he was awaked by the clattering of the weapons against the panel, and the sound of men’s hands taking them down; and when he was fully awake, he heard withal men going up and down the house as if on errands: but he called to mind what the Friend had said to him, and he did not so much as turn himself toward the hall; for he said: ‘Belike these men are outlaws and Wolves of the Holy Places, yet by seeming they are good fellows and nought churlish, nor have I to do with taking up the feud against them. I will abide the morning. Yet meseemeth that she drew me hither: for what cause?’

Therewith he fell asleep again, and dreamed no more. But when he awoke the sun was shining broad upon the hall-floor, and he sat up and listened, but could hear no sound save the moaning of the wind in the pine-boughs and the chatter of the starlings about the gables of the house; and the place seemed so exceeding lonely to him that he was in a manner feared by that loneliness.

Then he arose and clad himself, and went forth into the hall and gazed about him, and at first he deemed indeed that there was no one therein. But at last he looked and beheld the upper gable and there underneath a most goodly hanging was the glorious shape of a woman sitting on a bench covered over with a cloth of gold and silver; and he looked and looked to see if the woman might stir, and if she were alive, and she turned her head toward him, and lo it was the Friend; and his heart rose to his mouth for wonder and fear and desire. For now he doubted whether the other folk were aught save shows and shadows, and she the Goddess who had fashioned them out of nothing for his bewilderment, presently to return to nothing.

Yet whatever he might fear or doubt, he went up the hall towards her till he was quite nigh to her, and there he stood silent, wondering at her beauty and desiring her kindness.

Grey-eyed she was like her brother; but her hair the colour of red wheat: her lips full and red, her chin round, her nose fine and straight. Her hands and all her body fashioned exceeding sweetly and delicately; yet not as if she were an image of which the like might be found if the craftsman were but deft enough to make a perfect thing, but in such a way that there was none like to her for those that had eyes to behold her as she was; and none could ever be made like to her, even by such a master-craftsman as could fashion a body without a blemish.

She was clad in a white smock, whose hems were broidered with gold wire and precious gems of the Mountains, and over that a gown woven of gold and silver: scarce hath the world such another. On her head was a fillet of gold and gems, and there were wondrous gold rings on her arms: her feet lay bare on the dark grey wolf-skin that was stretched before her.

She smiled kindly upon his solemn and troubled face, and her voice sounded strangely familiar to him coming from all that loveliness, as she said: ‘Hail, Face-of-god! here am I left alone, although I deemed last night that I should be gone with the others. Therefore am I fain

to show myself to thee in fairer array than yesternight; for though we dwell in the wild-wood, from the solace of folk, yet are we not of thralls' blood. But come now, I bid thee break thy fast and talk with me a little while; and then shalt thou depart in peace.'

Spake Face-of-god, and his voice trembled as he spake: 'What art thou? Last night I deemed at whiles once and again that thou wert of the Gods; and now that I behold thee thus, and it is broad daylight, and of those others is no more to be seen than if they had never lived, I cannot but deem that it is even so, and that thou comest from the City that shall never perish. Now if thou be a goddess, I have nought to pray thee, save to slay me speedily if thou hast a mind for my death. But if thou art a woman—'

She broke in: 'Gold-mane, stay thy prayer and hold thy peace for this time, lest thou repent when repentance availeth not. And this I say because I am none of the Gods nor akin to them, save far off through the generations, as art thou also, and all men of goodly kindred. Now I bid thee eat thy meat, since 'tis ill talking betwixt a full man and a fasting; and I have dight it myself with mine own hands; for Bow-may and the Wood-mother went away with the rest three hours before dawn. Come sit and eat as thou hast a hardy heart; as forsooth thou shouldest do if I were a very goddess. Take heed, friend, lest I take thee for some damsel of the lower Dale arrayed in Earl's garments.'

She laughed therewith, and leaned toward him and put forth her hand to him, and he took it and caressed it; and the exceeding beauty of her body and of the raiment which was as it were a part of her and her loveliness, made her laughter and her friendly words strange to him, as if one did not belong to the other; as in a dream it might be. Nevertheless he did as she bade him, and sat at the board and ate, while she leaned forward on the arm of her chair and spake to him in friendly wise. And he wondered as she spake that she knew so much of him and his: and he kept saying to himself: 'She drew me hither; wherefore did she so?'

But she said: 'Gold-mane, how fareth thy father the Alderman? is he as good a wright as ever?'

He told her: Yea, that ever was his hammer on the iron, the copper, and the gold, and that no wright in the Dale was as deft as he.

Said she: 'Would he not have had thee seek to the Cities, to see the ways of the outer world?'

'Yea,' said he.

She said: 'Thou wert wise to naysay that offer; thou shalt have enough to do in the Dale and round about it in twelve months' time.'

'Art thou foresighted?' said he.

'Folk have called me so,' she said, 'but I wot not. But thy brother Hall-face, how fareth he?'

'Well,' said he, 'to my deeming he is the Sword of our House, and the Warrior of the Dale, if the days were ready for him.'

'And Stone-face, that stark ancient,' she said, 'doth he still love the Folk of the Dale, and hate all other folks?'

'Nay,' he said, 'I know not that, but I know that he loveth as, and above all me and my father.'

Again she spake: 'How fareth the Bride, the fair maid to whom thou art affianced?'

As she spake, it was to him as if his heart was stricken cold; but he put a force upon himself, and neither reddened nor whitened, nor changed countenance in any way; so he answered:

'She was well the eve of yesterday.' Then he remembered what she was, and her beauty and valour, and he constrained himself to say: 'Each day she groweth fairer; there is no man's son and no daughter of woman that does not love her; yea, the very beasts of field and fold love her.'

The Friend looked at him steadily and spake no word, but a red flush mounted to her cheeks and brow and changed her face; and he marvelled thereat; for still he misdoubted that she was a Goddess. But it passed away in a moment, and she smiled and said:

'Guest, thou seemest to wonder that I know concerning thee and the Dale and thy kindred. But now shalt thou wot that I have been in the Dale once and again, and my brother oftener still; and that I have seen thee before yesterday.'

'That is marvellous,' quoth he, 'for sure am I that I have not seen thee.'

'Yet thou hast seen me,' she said; 'yet not altogether as I am now;' and therewith she smiled on him friendly.

'How is this?' said he; 'art thou a skin-changer?'

‘Yea, in a fashion,’ she said. ‘Hearken! dost thou perchance remember a day of last summer when there was a market holden in Burgstead; and there stood in the way over against the House of the Face a tall old carle who was trucking deer-skins for diverse gear; and with him was a queen, tall and dark-skinned, somewhat well-liking, her hair bound up in a white coif so that none of it could be seen; by the token that she had a large stone of mountain blue set in silver stuck in the said coif?’

As she spoke she set her hand to her bosom and drew something from it, and held forth her hand to Gold-mane, and lo amidst the palm the great blue stone set in silver.

‘Wondrous as a dream is this,’ said Face-of-god, ‘for these twain I remember well, and what followed.’

She said: ‘I will tell thee that. There came a man of the Shepherd-Folk, drunk or foolish, or both, who began to chaffer with the big carle; but ever on the queen were his eyes set, and presently he put forth his hand to her to clip her, whereon the big carle hove up his fist and smote him, so that he fell to earth noseling. Then ran the folk together to hale off the stranger and help the shepherd, and it was like that the stranger should be mishandled. Then there thrust through the press a young man with yellow hair and grey eyes, who cried out, “Fellows, let be! The stranger had the right of it; this is no matter to make a quarrel or a court case of. Let the market go on! This man and maid are true folk.” So when the folk heard the young man and his bidding, they forebore and let the carle and the queen be, and the shepherd went his ways little hurt. Now then, who was this young man?’

Quoth Gold-mane: ‘It was even I, and meseemeth it was no great deed to do.’

‘Yea,’ she said, ‘and the big carle was my brother, and the tall queen, it was myself.’

‘How then,’ said he, ‘for she was as dark-skinned as a dwarf, and thou so bright and fair?’

She said: ‘Well, if the woods are good for nothing else, yet are they good for the growing of herbs, and I know the craft of simpling; and with one of these herbs had I stained my skin and my brother’s also. And it showed the darker beneath the white coif.’

‘Yea,’ said he, ‘but why must ye needs fare in feigned shapes? Ye would have been welcome guests in the Dale howsoever ye had come.’

‘I may not tell thee hereof as now,’ said she.

Said Gold-mane: ‘Yet thou mayst belike tell me wherefore was that thy brother desired to slay me yesterday, if he knew me, who I was.’

‘Gold-mane,’ she said, ‘thou art not slain, so little story need be made of that: for the rest, belike he knew thee not at that moment. So it falls with us, that we look to see foes rather than friends in the wild-woods. Many uncouth things are therein. Moreover, I must tell thee of my brother that whiles he is as the stalled bull late let loose, and nothing is good to him save battle and onset; and then is he blind and knows not friend from foe.’ Said Face-of-god: ‘Thou hast asked of me and mine; wilt thou not tell me of thee and thine?’

‘Nay,’ she said, ‘not as now; thou must betake thee to the way. Whither wert thou wending when thou happenedst upon us?’

He said: ‘I know not; I was seeking something, but I knew not what—meseemeth that now I have found it.’

‘Art thou for the great mountains seeking gems?’ she said. ‘Yet go not thither to-day: for who knoweth what thou shalt meet there that shall be thy foe?’

He said: ‘Nay, nay; I have nought to do but to abide here as long as I may, looking upon thee and hearkening to thy voice.’

Her eyes were upon his, but yet she did not seem to see him, and for a while she answered not; and still he wondered that mere words should come from so fair a thing; for whether she moved foot, or hand, or knee, or turned this way or that, each time she stirred it was a caress to his very heart.

He spake again: ‘May I not abide here a while? What scathe may be in that?’

‘It is not so,’ she said; ‘thou must depart, and that straightway: lo, there lieth thy spear which the Wood-mother hath brought in from the waste. Take thy gear to thee and wend thy ways. Have patience! I will lead thee to the place where we first met and there give thee farewell.’

Therewith she arose and he also perforce, and when they came to the doorway she stepped across the threshold and then turned back and gave him her hand and so led him forth, the sun flashing back from her golden raiment. Together they went over the short grey grass

of that hillside till they came to the place where he had arisen from that wrestle with her brother. There she stayed him and said:

‘This is the place; here must we part.’

But his heart failed him and he faltered in his speech as he said:

‘When shall I see thee again? Wilt thou slay me if I seek to thee hither once more?’

‘Hearken,’ she said, ‘autumn is now a-dying into winter: let winter and its snows go past: nor seek to me hither; for me thou should’st not find, but thy death thou mightest well fall in with; and I would not that thou shouldest die. When winter is gone, and spring is on the land, if thou hast not forgotten us thou shalt meet us again. Yet shalt thou go further than this Woodland Hall. In Shadowy Vale shalt thou seek to me then, and there will I talk with thee.’

‘And where,’ said he, ‘is Shadowy Vale? for thereof have I never heard tell.’

She said: ‘The token when it cometh to thee shall show thee thereof and the way thither. Art thou a babbler, Gold-mane?’

He said: ‘I have won no prize for babbling hitherto.’

She said: ‘If thou listest to babble concerning what hath befallen thee on the Mountain, so do, and repent it once only, that is, thy life long.’

‘Why should I say any word thereof?’ said he. ‘Dost thou not know the sweetness of such a tale untold?’

He spake as one who is somewhat wrathful, and she answered humbly and kindly:

‘Well is that. Bide thou the token that shall lead thee to Shadowy Vale. Farewell now.’

She drew her hand from his, and turned and went her ways swiftly to the house: he could not choose but gaze on her as she went glittering-bright and fair in that grey place of the mountains, till the dark doorway swallowed up her beauty. Then he turned away and took the path through the pine-woods, muttering to himself as he went:

‘What thing have I done now that hitherto I had not done? What manner of man am I to-day other than the man I was yesterday?’

CHAPTER VIII. FACE-OF-GOD COMETH HOME AGAIN TO BURGSTEAD.

Face-of-God went back through the wood by the way he had come, paying little heed to the things about him. For whatever he thought of strayed not one whit from the image of the Fair Woman of the Mountain-side.

He went through the wood swiftness than yesterday, and made no stay for noon or aught else, nor did he linger on the road when he was come into the Dale, either to speak to any or to note what they did. So he came to the House of the Face about dusk, and found no man within the hall either carle or queen. So he cried out on the folk, and there came in a damsel of the house, whom he greeted kindly and she him again. He bade her bring the washing-water, and she did so and washed his feet and his hands. She was a fair maid enough, as were most in the Dale, but he heeded her little; and when she was done he kissed not her cheek for her pains, as his wont was, but let her go her ways unthanked. But he went to his shut-bed and opened his chest, and drew fair raiment from it, and did off his wood-gear, and did on him a goodly scarlet kirtle fairly brodered, and a collar with gems of price therein, and other braveries. And when he was so attired he came out into the hall, and there was old Stone-face standing by the hearth, which was blazing brightly with fresh brands, so that things were clear to see.

Stone-face noted Gold-mane’s gay raiment, for he was not wont to wear such attire, save on the feasts and high days when he behoved to. So the old man smiled and said:

‘Welcome back from the Wood! But what is it? Hast thou been wedded there, or who hath made thee Earl and King?’

Said Face-of-god: ‘Foster-father, sooth it is that I have been to the wood, but there have I seen nought of manfolk worse than myself. Now as to my raiment, needs must I keep it from the moth. And I am weary withal, and this kirtle is light and easy to me. Moreover, I look to see the Bride here again, and I would pleasure her with the sight of gay raiment upon me.’

‘Nay,’ said Stone-face, ‘hast thou not seen some woman in the wood arrayed like the image of a God? and hath she not bidden thee thus to worship her to-night? For I know that such wights be in the wood, and that such is their wont.’

Said Gold-mane: 'I worship nought save the Gods and the Fathers. Nor saw I in the wood any such as thou sayest.'

Therewith Stone-face shook his head; but after a while he said:

'Art thou for the wood to-morrow?'

'Nay,' said Gold-mane angrily, knitting his brows.

'The morrow of to-morrow,' said Stone-face, 'is the day when we look to see the Westland merchants: after all, wilt thou not go hence with them when they wend their ways back before the first snows fall?'

'Nay,' said he, 'I have no mind to it, fosterer; cease egging me on hereto.'

Then Stone-face shook his head again, and looked on him long, and muttered: 'To the wood wilt thou go to-morrow or next day; or some day when doomed is thine undoing.'

Therewith entered the service and torches, and presently after came the Alderman with Hall-face; and Iron-face greeted his son and said to him: 'Thou hast not hit the time to do on thy gay raiment, for the Bride will not be here to-night; she bideth still at the Feast at the Apple-tree House: or wilt thou be there, son?'

'Nay,' said Face-of-god, 'I am over-weary. And as for my raiment, it is well; it is for thine honour and the honour of the name.'

So to table they went, and Iron-face asked his son of his ways again, and whether he was quite fixed in his mind not to go down to the Plain and the Cities: 'For,' said he, 'the morrow of to-morrow shall the merchants be here, and this were great news for them if the son of the Alderman should be their faring-fellow back.'

But Face-of-god answered without any haste or heat: 'Nay, father, it may not be: fear not, thou shalt see that I have a good will to work and live in the Dale.'

And in good sooth, though he was a young man and loved mirth and the ways of his own will, he was a stalwarth workman, and few could mow a match with him in the hay-month and win it; or fell trees as certainly and swiftly, or drive as straight and clean a furrow through the stiff land of the lower Dale; and in other matters also was he deft and sturdy.

CHAPTER IX. THOSE BRETHREN FARE TO THE YEWWOOD WITH THE BRIDE.

Next morning Face-of-god dight himself for work, and took his axe; for his brother Hall-face had bidden him go down with him to the Yew-wood and cut timber there, since he of all men knew where to go straight to the sticks that would quarter best for bow-staves; whereas the Alderman had the right of hewing in that wood. So they went forth, those brethren, from the House of the Face, but when they were gotten to the gate, who should be there but the Bride awaiting them, and she with an ass duly saddled for bearing the yew-sticks. Because Hall-face had told her that he and belike Gold-mane were going to hew in the wood, and she thought it good to be of the company, as oft had befallen erst. When they met she greeted Face-of-god and kissed him as her wont was; and he looked upon her and saw how fair she was, and how kind and friendly were her eyes that beheld him, and how her whole face was eager for him as their lips parted. Then his heart failed him, when he knew that he no longer desired her as she did him, and he said within himself:

'Would that she had been of our nighest kindred! Would that I had had a sister and that this were she!'

So the three went along the highway down the Dale, and Hall-face and the Bride talked merrily together and laughed, for she was happy, since she knew that Gold-mane had been to the wood and was back safe and much as he had been before. So indeed it seemed of him; for though at first he was moody and of few words, yet presently he cursed himself for a mar-sport, and so fell into the talk, and enforced himself to be merry; and soon he was so indeed; for he thought: 'She drew me thither: she hath a deed for me to do. I shall do the deed and have my reward. Soon will the spring-tide be here, and I shall be a young man yet when it comes.'

So came they to the place where he had met the three maidens yesterday; there they also turned from the highway; and as they went down the bent, Gold-mane could not but turn his eyes on the beauty of the Bride and the lovely ways of her body: but presently he remembered all that had betid, and turned away again as one who is noting what it behoves him not to note. And he said to himself: 'Where art thou, Gold-mane? Whose art thou? Yea, even if that

had been but a dream that I have dreamed, yet would that this fair woman were my sister!’

So came they to the Yew-wood, and the brethren fell to work, and the Bride with them, for she was deft with the axe and strong withal. But at midday they rested on the green slope without the Yew-wood; and they ate bread and flesh and onions and apples, and drank red wine of the Dale. And while they were resting after their meat, the Bride sang to them, and her song was a lay of time past; and here ye have somewhat of it:

’Tis over the hill and over the dale
Men ride from the city fast and far,
If they may have a soothfast tale,
True tidings of the host of war.
And first they hap on men-at-arms,
All clad in steel from head to foot:
Now tell true tale of the new-come harms,
And the gathered hosts of the mountain-root.
Fair sirs, from murder-carles we flee,
Whose fashion is as the mountain-trolls’;
No man can tell how many they be,
And the voice of their host as the thunder rolls.
They were weary men at the ending of day,
But they spurred nor stayed for longer word.
Now ye, O merchants, whither away?
What do ye there with the helm and the sword?
O we must fight for life and gear,
For our beasts are spent and our wains are stayed,
And the host of the Mountain-men draws near,
That maketh all the world afraid.
They left the chapmen on the hill,
And through the eve and through the night
They rode to have true tidings still,
And were there on the way when the dawn was bright.
O damsels fair, what do ye then
To loiter thus upon the way,
And have no fear of the Mountain-men,
The host of the carles that strip and slay?
O riders weary with the road,
Come eat and drink on the grass hereby!
And lay you down in a fair abode
Till the midday sun is broad and high;
Then unto you shall we come aback,
And lead you forth to the Mountain-men,
To note their plenty and their lack,
And have true tidings there and then.
’Tis over the hill and over the dale
They ride from the mountain fast and far;
And now have they learned a soothfast tale,
True tidings of the host of war.
It was summer-tide and the Month of Hay,
And men and maids must fare afield;
But we saw the place were the bow-staves lay,
And the hall was hung with spear and shield.
When the moon was high we drank in the hall,
And they drank to the guests and were kind and blithe,
And they said: Come back when the chestnuts fall,
And the wine-carts wend across the hythe.
Come oft and o’er again, they said;
Wander your ways; but we abide
For all the world in the little stead;
For wise are we, though the world be wide.
Yea, come in arms if ye will, they said;
And despite your host shall we abide
For life or death in the little stead;
For wise are we, though the world be wide.

So she made an end and looked at the fairness of the dale spreading wide before her, and a robin came nigh from out of a thorn-bush and sung his song also, the sweet herald of coming winter; and the lapwings wheeled about, black and white, above the meadow by the river, sending forth their wheedling pipe as they hung above the soft turf.

She felt the brothers near her, and knew their friendliness from of old, and she was happy; nor had she looked closer at Gold-mane would she have noted any change in him belike; for the meat and the good wine, and the fair sunny time, and the Bride’s sweet voice, and the ancient song softened his heart while it fed the desire therein.

So in a while they arose from their rest and did what was left them of their work, and so went back to Burgstead through the fair afternoon; by seeming all three in all content. But

yet Gold-mane, as from time to time he looked upon the Bride, kept saying to himself: 'O if she had been but my sister! sweet had the kinship been!'

CHAPTER X. NEW TIDINGS IN THE DALE.

It was three days thereafter that Gold-mane, leading an ass, went along the highway to fetch home certain fleeces which were needed for the house from a stead a little west of Wild-lake; but he had gone scant half a mile ere he fell in with a throng of folk going to Burgstead. They were of the Shepherds; they had weapons with them, and some were clad in coats of fence. They went along making a great noise, for they were all talking each to each at the same time, and seemed very hot and eager about some matter. When they saw Gold-mane anigh, they stopped, and the throng opened as if to let him into their midmost; so he mingled with them, and they stood in a ring about him and an old man more ill-favoured than it was the wont of the Dalesmen to be.

For he was long, stooping, gaunt and spindle-shanked, his hands big and crippled with gout: his cheeks were red after an old man's fashion, covered with a crimson network like a pippin; his lips thin and not well hiding his few teeth; his nose long like a snipe's neb. In short, a shame and a laughing-stock to the Folk, and a man whom the kindreds had in small esteem, and that for good reasons.

Face-of-god knew him at once for a notable close-fist and starve-all fool of the Shepherds; and his name was now become Penny-thumb the Lean, whatever it might once have been.

So Face-of-god greeted all men, and they him again; and he said: 'What aileth you, neighbours? Your weapons, are bare, but I see not that they be bloody. What is it, goodman Penny-thumb?'

Penny-thumb did but groan for all answer; but a stout carle who stood by with a broad grin on his face answered and said:

'Face-of-god, evil tidings be abroad; the strong-thieves of the wood are astir; and some deem that the wood-wights be helping them.'

'Yea, and what is the deed they have done?' said Gold-mane.

Said the carle: 'Thou knowest Penny-thumb's abode?'

'Yea surely,' said Face-of-god; 'fair are the water-meadows about it; great gain of cheese can be gotten thence.'

'Hast thou been within the house?' said the carle.

'Nay,' said Gold-mane.

Then spake Penny-thumb: 'Within is scant gear: we gather for others to scatter; we make meat for others' mouths.'

The carle laughed: 'Sooth is that,' said he, 'that there is little gear therein now; for the strong-thieves have voided both hall and bower and byre.'

'And when was that?' said Face-of-god.

'The night before last night,' said the carle, 'the door was smitten on, and when none answered it was broken down.'

'Yea,' quoth Penny-thumb, 'a host entered, and they in arms.'

'No host was within,' said the carle, 'nought but Penny-thumb and his sister and his sister's son, and three carles that work for him; and one of them, Rusty to wit, was the worst man of the hill-country. These then the host whereof the goodman telleth bound, but without doing them any scathe; and they ransacked the house, and took away much gear; yet left some.'

'Thou liest,' said Penny-thumb; 'they took little and left none.'

Thereat all men laughed, for this seemed to them good game, and another man said: 'Well, neighbour Penny-thumb, if it was so little, thou hast done unneighbourly in giving us such a heap of trouble about it.'

And they laughed again, but the first carle said: 'True it is, goodman, that thou wert exceeding eager to raise the hue and cry after that little when we happed upon thee and thy housemates bound in your chairs yesterday morning. Well, Alderman's son, short is the tale to tell: we could not fail to follow the gear, and the slot led us into the wood, and ill is the going there for us shepherds, who are used to the bare downs, save Rusty, who was a good woodsman and lifted the slot for us; so he outwent us all, and ran out of sight of us, so presently we came upon him dead-slain, with the manslayer's spear in his breast. What then could we

do but turn back again, for now was the wood blind now Rusty was dead, and we knew not whither to follow the fray; and the man himself was but little loss: so back we turned, and told goodman Penny-thumb of all this, for we had left him alone in his hall lamenting his gear; so we bided to-day's morn, and have come out now, with our neighbour and the spear, and the dead corpse of Rusty. Stand aside, neighbours, and let the Alderman's son see it.'

They did so, and there was the corpse of a thin-faced tall wiry man, somewhat foxy of aspect, lying on a hand-bier covered with black cloth.

'Yea, Face-of-god,' said the carle, 'he is not good to see now he is dead, yet alive was he worse: but, look you, though the man was no good man, yet was he of our people, and the feud is with us; so we would see the Alderman, and do him to wit of the tidings, that he may call the neighbours together to seek a blood-wite for Rusty and atonement for the ransacking. Or what sayest thou?'

'Have ye the spear that ye found in Rusty?' quoth Gold-mane.

'Yea verily,' said the carle. 'Hither with it, neighbours; give it to the Alderman's son.'

So the spear came into his hand, and he looked at it and said:

'This is no spear of the smiths' work of the Dale, as my father will tell you. We take but little keep of the forging of spearheads here, so that they be well-tempered and made so as to ride well on the shaft; but this head, daintily is it wrought, the blood-trench as clean and trim as though it were an Earl's sword. See you withal this inlaying of runes on the steel? It is done with no tin or copper, but with very silver; and these bands about the shaft be of silver also. It is a fair weapon, and the owner hath a loss of it greater than his gain in the slaying of Rusty; and he will have left it in the wound so that he might be known hereafter, and that he might be said not to have murdered Rusty but to have slain him. Or how think ye?'

They all said that this seemed like to be; but that if the man who had slain Rusty were one of the ransackers they might have a blood-wite of him, if they could find him. Gold-mane said that so it was, and therewithal he gave the shepherds good-speed and went on his way.

But they came to Burgstead and found the Alderman, and in due time was a Court held, and a finding uttered, and outlawry given forth for the manslaying and the ransacking against certain men unknown. As for the spear, it was laid up in the House of the Face.

But Face-of-god pondered these matters in his mind, for such ransackings there had been none of in late years; and he said to himself that his friends of the Mountain must have other folk, of which the Dalesmen knew nought, whose gear they could lift, or how could they live in that place. And he marvelled that they should risk drawing the Dalesmen's wrath upon them; whereas they of the Dale were strong men not easily daunted, albeit peaceable enough if not stirred to wrath. For in good sooth he had no doubt concerning that spear, whose it was and whence it came: for that very weapon had been leaning against the panel of his shut-bed the night he slept on the Mountain, and all the other spears that he saw there were more or less of the same fashion, and adorned with silver.

Albeit all that he knew, and all that he thought of, he kept in his own heart and said nothing of it.

So wore the autumn into early winter; and the Westland merchants came in due time, and departed without Face-of-god, though his father made him that offer one last time. He went to and fro about his work in the Dale, and seemed to most men's eyes nought changed from what he had been. But the Bride noted that he saw her less often than his wont was, and abode with her a lesser space when he met her; and she could not think what this might mean; nor had she heart to ask him thereof, though she was sorry and grieved, but rather withdrew her company from him somewhat; and when she perceived that he noted it not, and made no question of it, then was she the sorrier.

But the first winter-snow came on with a great storm of wind from the north-east, so that no man stirred abroad who was not compelled thereto, and those who went abroad risked life and limb thereby. Next morning all was calm again, and the snow was deep, but it did not endure long, for the wind shifted to the southwest and the thaw came, and three days after, when folk could fare easily again up and down the Dale, came tidings to Burgstead and the Alderman from the Lower Dale, how a house called Greentofts had been ransacked there, and none knew by whom. Now the goodman of Greentofts was little loved of the neighbours: he was grasping and overbearing, and had often cowed others out of their due: he was very cross-grained, both at home and abroad: his wife had fled from his hand, neither did his sons find it good to abide with him: therewithal he was wealthy of goods, a strong man and a deft

man-at-arms. When his sons and his wife departed from him, and none other of the Dalesmen cared to abide with him, he went down into the Plain, and got thence men to be with him for hire, men who were not well seen to in their own land. These to the number of twelve abode with him, and did his bidding whenso it pleased them. Two more had he had who had been slain by good men of the Dale for their masterful ways; and no blood-wite had been paid for them, because of their ill-doings, though they had not been made outlaws. This man of Greentofts was called Harts-bane after his father, who was a great hunter.

Now the full tidings of the ransacking were these: The storm began two hours before sunset, and an hour thereafter, when it was quite dark, for without none could see because the wind was at its height and the drift of the snow was hard and full, the hall-door flew open; and at first men thought it had been the wind, until they saw in the dimness (for all lights but the fire on the hearth had been quenched) certain things tumbling in which at first they deemed were wolves; but when they took swords and staves against them, lo they were met by swords and axes, and they saw that the seeming wolves were men with wolf-skins drawn over them. So the new-comers cowed them that they threw down their weapons, and were bound in their places; but when they were bound, and had had time to note who the ransackers were, they saw that there were but six of them all told, who had cowed and bound Harts-bane and his twelve masterful men; and this they deemed a great shaming to them, as might well be.

So then the stead was ransacked, and those wolves took away what they would, and went their ways through the fierce storm, and none could tell whether they had lived or died in it; but at least neither the men nor their prey were seen again; nor did they leave any slot, for next morning the snow lay deep over everything.

No doubt had Gold-mane but that these ransackers were his friends of the Mountain; but he held his peace, abiding till the winter should be over.

CHAPTER XI. MEN MAKE OATH AT BURGSTEAD ON THE HOLY BOAR.

A week after the ransacking at Greentofts the snow and the winter came on in earnest, and all the Dale lay in snow, and men went on skids when they fared up and down the Dale or on the Mountain.

All was now tidingless till Yule over, and in Burgstead was there feasting and joyance enough; and especially at the House of the Face was high-tide holden, and the Alderman and his sons and Stone-face and all the kindred and all their men sat in glorious attire within the hall; and many others were there of the best of the kindreds of Burgstead who had been bidden.

Face-of-god sat between his father and Stone-face; and he looked up and down the tables and the hall and saw not the Bride, and his heart misgave him because she was not there, and he wondered what had befallen and if she were sick of sorrow.

But Iron-face beheld him how he gazed about, and he laughed; for he was exceeding merry that night and fared as a young man. Then he said to his son: 'Whom seekest thou, son? is there someone lacking?'

Face-of-god reddened as one who lies unused to it, and said:

'Yea, kinsman, so it is that I was seeking the Bride my kinswoman.'

'Nay,' said Iron-face, 'call her not kinswoman: therein is ill-luck, lest it seem that thou art to wed one too nigh thine own blood. Call her the Bride only: to thee and to me the name is good. Well, son, desirest thou sorely to see her?'

'Yea, yea, surely,' said Face-of-god; but his eyes went all about the hall still, as though his mind strayed from the place and that home of his.

Said Iron-face: 'Have patience, son, thou shalt see her anon, and that in such guise as shall please thee.'

Therewithal came the maidens with the ewers of wine, and they filled all horns and beakers, and then stood by the endlong tables on either side laughing and talking with the carles and the older women; and the hall was a fair sight to see, for the many candles burned bright and the fire on the hearth flared up, and those maids were clad in fair raiment, and there was none of them but was comely, and some were fair, and some very fair: the walls also were hung with goodly pictured cloths, and the image of the God of the Face looked down smiling terribly from the gable-end above the high-seat.

Thus as they sat they heard the sound of a horn winded close outside the hall door, and the door was smitten on. Then rose Iron-face smiling merrily, and cried out:

‘Enter ye, whether ye be friends or foes: for if ye be foemen, yet shall ye keep the holy peace of Yule, unless ye be the foes of all kindreds and nations, and then shall we slay you.’

Thereat some who knew what was toward laughed; but Gold-mane, who had been away from Burgstead some days past, marvelled and knit his brows, and let his right hand fall on his sword-hilt. For this folk, who were of merry ways, were wont to deal diversely with the Yule-tide customs in the manner of shows; and he knew not that this was one of them.

Now was the Outer door thrown open, and there entered seven men, whereof two were all-armed in bright war-gear, and two bore slug-horns, and two bore up somewhat on a dish covered over with a piece of rich cloth, and the seventh stood before them all wrapped up in a dark fur mantle.

Thus they stood a moment; and when he saw their number, back to Gold-mane’s heart came the thought of those folk on the Mountain: for indeed he was somewhat out of himself for doubt and longing, else would he have deemed that all this was but a Yule-tide play.

Now the men with the slug-horns set them to their mouths and blew a long blast; while the first of the new-comers set hand to the clasps of the fur cloak and let it fall to the ground, and lo! a woman exceeding beauteous, clad in glistening raiment of gold and fine web; her hair wreathed with bay, and in her hand a naked sword with goodly-wrought golden hilt and polished blue-gleaming blade.

Face-of-god started up in his sear, and stared like a man new-wakened from a strange dream: because for one moment he deemed verily that it was the Woman of the Mountain arrayed as he had last seen her, and he cried aloud ‘The Friend, the Friend!’

His father brake out into loud laughter thereat, and clapped his son on the shoulder and said: ‘Yea, yea, lad, thou mayst well say the Friend; for this is thine old playmate whom thou hast been looking round the hall for, arrayed this eve in such fashion as is meet for her goodliness and her worthiness. Yea, this is the Friend indeed!’

Then waxed Face-of-god as red as blood for shame, and he sat him down in his place again: for now he wotted what was toward, and saw that this fair woman was the Bride.

But Stone-face from the other side looked keenly on him.

Then blew the horns again, and the Bride stepped daintily up the hall, and the sweet odour of her raiment went from her about the fire-warmed dwelling, and her beauty moved all hearts with love. So stood she at the high-table; and those two who bore the burden set it down thereon and drew off the covering, and lo! there was the Holy Boar of Yule on which men were wont to make oath of deeds that they would do in the coming year, according to the custom of their forefathers. Then the Bride laid the goodly sword beside the dish, and then went round the table and sat down betwixt Face-of-god and Stone-face, and turned kindly to Gold-mane, and was glad; for now was his fair face as its wont was to be. He in turn smiled upon her, for she was fair and kind and his fellow for many a day.

Now the men-at-arms stood each side the Boar, and out from them on each side stood the two hornsmen: then these blew up again, whereon the Alderman stood up and cried:

‘Ye sons of the brave who have any deed that ye may be desirous of doing, come up, come lay your hand on the sword, and the point of the sword to the Holy Beast, and swear the oath that lieth on your hearts.’

Therewith he sat down, and there strode a man up the hall, strong-built and sturdy, but short of stature; black-haired, red-bearded, and ruddy-faced: and he stood on the daïs, and took up the sword and laid its point on the Boar, and said:

‘I am Bristler, son of Brightling, a man of the Shepherds. Here by the Holy Boar I swear to follow up the ransackers of Penny-thumb and the slayers of Rusty. And I take this feud upon me, although they be no good men, because I am of the kin and it falleth to me, since others forbear; and when the Court was hallowed hereon I was away out of the Dale and the Downs. So help me the Warrior, and the God of the Earth.’

Then the Alderman nodded his head to him kindly, and reached him out a cup of wine, and as he drank there went up a rumour of praise from the hall; and men said that his oath was manly and that he was like to keep it; for he was a good man-at-arms and a stout heart.

Then came up three men of the Shepherds and two of the Dale and swore to help Bristler in his feud, and men thought it well sworn.

After that came a braggart, a man very gay of his raiment, and swore with many words that if he lived the year through he would be a captain over the men of the Plain, and would come back again with many gifts for his friends in the Dale. This men deemed foolishly sworn, for they knew the man; so they jeered at him and laughed as he went back to his place ashamed.

Then swore three others oaths not hard to be kept, and men laughed and were merry.

At last uprose the Alderman, and said: 'Kinsmen, and good fellows, good days and peaceable are in the Dale as now; and of such days little is the story, and little it availeth to swear a deed of derring-do: yet three things I swear by this Beast; and first to gainsay no man's asking if I may perform it; and next to set right above law and mercy above custom; and lastly, if the days change and war cometh to us or we go to meet it, I will be no backwarder in the onset than three fathoms behind the foremost. So help me the Warrior, and the God of the Face and the Holy Earth!'

Therewith he sat down, and all men shouted for joy of him, and said that it was most like that he would keep his oath.

Last of all uprose Face-of-god and took up the sword and looked at it; and so bright was the blade that he saw in it the image of the golden braveries which the Bride bore, and even some broken image of her face. Then he handled the hilt and laid the point on the Boar, and cried:

'Hereby I swear to wed the fairest woman of the Earth before the year is worn to an end; and that whether the Dalesmen gainsay me or the men beyond the Dale. So help me the Warrior, and the God of the Face and the Holy Earth!'

Therewith he sat down; and once more men shouted for the love of him and of the Bride, and they said he had sworn well and like a chieftain.

But the Bride noted him that neither were his eyes nor his voice like to their wont as he swore, for she knew him well; and thereat was she ill at ease, for now whatever was new in him was to her a threat of evil to come.

Stone-face also noted him, and he knew the young man better than all others save the Bride, and he saw withal that she was ill-pleased, and he said to himself: 'I will speak to my fosterling to-morrow if I may find him alone.'

So came the swearing to an end, and they fell to on their meat and feasted on the Boar of Atonement after they had duly given the Gods their due share, and the wine went about the hall and men were merry till they drank the parting cup and fared to rest in the shut-beds, and whereso else they might in the Hall and the House, for there were many men there.

CHAPTER XII. STONE-FACE TELLETH CONCERNING THE WOOD-WIGHTS.

Early on the morrow Gold-mane arose and clad himself and went out-a-doors and over the trodden snow on to the bridge over the Weltering Water, and there betook himself into one of the coins of safety built over the up-stream piles; there he leaned against the wall and turned his face to the Thorp, and fell to pondering on his case. And first he thought about his oath, and how that he had sworn to wed the Mountain Woman, although his kindred and her kindred should gainsay him, yea and herself also. Great seemed that oath to him, yet at that moment he wished he had made it greater, and made all the kindred, yea and the Bride herself, sure of the meaning of the words of it: and he deemed himself a dastard that he had not done so. Then he looked round him and beheld the winter, and he fell into mere longing that the spring were come and the token from the Mountain. Things seemed too hard for him to deal with, and he between a mighty folk and two wayward women; and he went nigh to wish that he had taken his father's offer and gone down to the Cities; and even had he met his bane: well were that! And, as young folk will, he set to work making a picture of his deeds there, had he been there. He showed himself the stricken fight in the plain, and the press, and the struggle, and the breaking of the serried band, and himself amidst the ring of foemen doing most valiantly, and falling there at last, his shield o'er-heavy with the weight of foemen's spears for a man to uphold it. Then the victory of his folk and the lamentation and praise over the slain man of the Mountain Dales, and the burial of the valiant warrior, the praising weeping folk meeting him at the City-gate, laid stark and cold in his arms on the gold-hung garlanded bier.

There ended his dream, and he laughed aloud and said: 'I am a fool! All this were good and sweet if I should see it myself; and forsooth that is how I am thinking of it, as if I still alive should see myself dead and famous!'

Then he turned a little and looked at the houses of the Thorp lying dark about the snowy ways under the starlit heavens of the winter morning: dark they were indeed and grey, save where here and there the half-burned Yule-fire reddened the windows of a hall, or where, as in one place, the candle of some early waker shone white in a chamber window. There was scarce a man astir, he deemed, and no sound reached him save the crowing of the cocks muffled by their houses, and a faint sound of beasts in the byres.

Thus he stood a while, his thoughts wandering now, till presently he heard footsteps coming his way down the street and turned toward them, and lo it was the old man Stone-face. He had seen Gold-mane go out, and had risen and followed him that he might talk with him apart. Gold-mane greeted him kindly, though, sooth to say, he was but half content to see him; since he doubted, what was verily the case, that his foster-father would give him many words, counselling him to refrain from going to the wood, and this was loathsome to him; but he spake and said:

‘Meseems, father, that the eastern sky is brightening toward dawn.’

‘Yea,’ quoth Stone-face.

‘It will be light in an hour,’ said Face-of-god.

‘Even so,’ said Stone-face.

‘And a fair day for the morrow of Yule,’ said the swain.

‘Yea,’ said Stone-face, ‘and what wilt thou do with the fair day? Wilt thou to the wood?’

‘Maybe, father,’ said Gold-mane; ‘Hall-face and some of the swains are talking of elks up the fells which may be trapped in the drifts, and if they go a-hunting them, I may go in their company.’

‘Ah, son,’ quoth Stone-face, ‘thou wilt look to see other kind of beasts than elks. Things may ye fall in with there who may not be impounded in the snow like to elks, but can go light-foot on the top of the soft drift from one place to another.’

Said Gold-mane: ‘Father, fear me not; I shall either refrain me from the wood, or if I go, I shall go to hunt the wood-deer with other hunters. But since thou hast come to me, tell me more about the wood, for thy tales thereof are fair.’

‘Yea,’ said Stone-face, ‘fair tales of foul things, as oft it befalleth in the world. Hearken now! if thou deemest that what thou seekest shall come readier to thine hand because of the winter and the snow, thou errest. For the wights that waylay the bodies and souls of the mighty in the wild-wood heed such matters nothing; yea and at Yule-tide are they most abroad, and most armed for the fray. Even such an one have I seen time ago, when the snow was deep and the wind was rough; and it was in the likeness of a woman clad in such raiment as the Bride bore last night, and she trod the snow light-foot in thin raiment where it would scarce bear the skids of a deft snow-runner. Even so she stood before me; the icy wind blew her raiment round about her, and drifted the hair from her garlanded head toward me, and she as fair and fresh as in the midsummer days. Up the fell she fared, sweetest of all things to look on, and beckoned on me to follow; on me, the Warrior, the Stout-heart; and I followed, and between us grief was born; but I it was that fostered that child and not she. Always when she would be, was she merry and lovely; and even so is she now, for she is of those that be long-lived. And I wot that thou hast seen even such an one!’

‘Tell me more of thy tales, foster-father,’ said Gold-mane, ‘and fear not for me!’

‘Ah, son,’ he said, ‘mayst thou have no such tales to tell to those that shall be young when thou art old. Yet hearken! We sat in the hall together and there was no third; and methought that the birds sang and the flowers bloomed, and sweet was their savour, though it was mid-winter. A rose-wreath was on her head; grapes were on the board, and fair unwrinkled summer apples on the day that we feasted together. When was the feast? sayst thou. Long ago. What was the hall, thou sayest, wherein ye feasted? I know not if it were on the earth or under it, or if we rode the clouds that even. But on the morrow what was there but the stark wood and the drift of the snow, and the iron wind howling through the branches, and a lonely man, a wanderer rising from the ground. A wanderer through the wood and up the fell, and up the high mountain, and up and up to the edges of the ice-river and the green caves of the ice-hills. A wanderer in spring, in summer, autumn and winter, with an empty heart and a burning never-satisfied desire; who hath seen in the uncouth places many an evil unmanly shape, many a foul hag and changing ugly semblance; who hath suffered hunger and thirst and wounding and fever, and hath seen many things, but hath never again seen that fair

woman, or that lovely feast-hall.

‘All praise and honour to the House of the Face, and the bounteous valiant men thereof! and the like praise and honour to the fair women whom they wed of the valiant and goodly House of the Steer!’

‘Even so say I,’ quoth Gold-mane calmly; ‘but now wend we aback to the House, for it is morning indeed, and folk will be stirring there.’

So they turned from the bridge together; and Stone-face was kind and fatherly, and was telling his foster-son many wise things concerning the life of a chieftain, and the giving-out of dooms and the gathering for battle; to all which talk Face-of-god seemed to hearken gladly, but indeed hearkened not at all; for verily his eyes were beholding that snowy waste, and the fair woman upon it; even such an one as Stone-face had told of.

CHAPTER XIII. THEY FARE TO THE HUNTING OF THE ELK.

When they came into the Hall, the hearth-fire had been quickened, and the sleepers on the floor had been wakened, and all folk were astir. So the old man sat down by the hearth while Gold-mane busied himself in fetching wood and water, and in sweeping out the Hall, and other such works of the early morning. In a little while Hall-face and the other young men and warriors were afoot duly clad, and the Alderman came from his chamber and greeted all men kindly. Soon meat was set upon the boards, and men broke their fast; and day dawned while they were about it, and ere it was all done the sun rose clear and golden, so that all men knew that the day would be fair, for the frost seemed hard and enduring.

Then the eager young men and the hunters, and those who knew the mountain best drew together about the hearth, and fell to talking of the hunting of the elk; and there were three there who knew both the woods and also the fells right up to the ice-rivers better than any other; and these said that they who were fain of the hunting of the elk would have no likelier time than that day for a year to come. Short was the rede betwixt them, for they said they would go to the work at once and make the most of the short winter daylight. So they went each to his place, and some outside that House to their fathers’ houses to fetch each man his gear. Face-of-god for his part went to his shut-bed, and stood by his chest, and opened it, and drew out of it a fine hauberk of ring-mail which his father had made for him: for though Face-of-god was a deft wright, he was not by a long way so deft as his father, who was the deftest of all men of that time and country; so that the alien merchants would give him what he would for his hauberks and helms, whenso he would chaffer with them, which was but seldom. So Face-of-god did on this hauberk over his kirtle, and over it he cast his foul-weather weed, so that none might see it: he girt a strong war-sword to his side, cast his quiver over his shoulder, and took his bow in his hand, although he had little lust to shoot elks that day, even as Stone-face had said; therewithal he took his skids, and went forth of the hall to the gate of the Burg; whereto gathered the whole company of twenty-three, and Gold-mane the twenty-fourth. And each man there had his skids and his bow and quiver, and whatso other weapon, as short-sword, or wood-knife, or axe, seemed good to him.

So they went out-a-gates, and clomb the stairway in the cliff which led to the ancient watch-tower: for it was on the lower slopes of the fells which lay near to the Weltering Water that they looked to find the elks, and this was the nighest road thereto. When they had gotten to the top they lost no time, but went their ways nearly due east, making way easily where there were but scattered trees close to the lip of the sheer cliffs.

They went merrily on their skids over the close-lying snow, and were soon up on the great shoulders of the fells that went up from the bank of the Weltering Water: at noon they came into a little dale wherein were a few trees, and there they abided to eat their meat, and were very merry, making for themselves tables and benches of the drifted snow, and piling it up to windward as a defence against the wind, which had now arisen, little but bitter from the south-east; so that some, and they the wisest, began to look for foul weather: wherefore they tarried the shorter while in the said dale or hollow.

But they were scarcely on their way again before the aforesaid south-east wind began to grow bigger, and at last blew a gale, and brought up with it a drift of fine snow, through which they yet made their way, but slowly, till the drift grew so thick that they could not see each other five paces apart.

Then perforce they made stay, and gathered together under a bent which by good luck they happened upon, where they were sheltered from the worst of the drift. There they abode, till

in less than an hour's space the drift abated and the wind fell, and in a little while after it was quite clear, with the sun shining brightly and the young waxing moon white and high up in the heavens; and the frost was harder than ever.

This seemed good to them; but now that they could see each other's faces they fell to telling over their company, and there was none missing save Face-of-god. They were somewhat dismayed thereat, but knew not what to do, and they deemed he might not be far off, either a little behind or a little ahead; and Hall-face said:

'There is no need to make this to-do about my brother; he can take good care of himself; neither does a warrior of the Face die because of a little cold and frost and snow-drift. Withal Gold-mane is a wilful man, and of late days hath been wilful beyond his wont; let us now find the elks.'

So they went on their ways hoping to fall in with him again. No long story need be made of their hunting, for not very far from where they had taken shelter they came upon the elks, many of them, impounded in the drifts, pretty much where the deft hunters looked to find them. There then was battle between the elks and the men, till the beasts were all slain and only one man hurt: then they made them sleighs from wood which they found in the hollows thereby, and they laid the carcasses thereon, and so turned their faces homeward, dragging their prey with them. But they met not Face-of-god either there or on the way home; and Hall-face said: 'Maybe Gold-mane will lie on the fell to-night; and I would I were with him; for adventures oft befall such folk when they abide in the wilds.'

Now it was late at night by then they reached Burgstead, so laden as they were with the dead beasts; but they heeded the night little, for the moon was well-nigh as bright as day for them. But when they came to the gate of the Thorp, there were assembled the goodmen and swains to meet them with torches and wine in their honour. There also was Gold-mane come back before them, yea for these two hours; and he stood clad in his holiday raiment and smiled on them.

Then was there some jeering at him that he was come back empty-handed from the hunting, and that he was not able to abide the wind and the drift; but he laughed thereat, for all this was but game and play, since men knew him for a keen hunter and a stout woodsman; and they had deemed it a heavy loss of him if he had been cast away, as some feared he had been: and his brother Hall-face embraced him and kissed him, and said to him: 'Now the next time that thou farest to the wood will I be with thee foot to foot, and never leave thee, and then meseemeth I shall wot of the tale that hath befallen thee, and belike it shall be no sorry one.'

Face-of-god laughed and answered but little, and they all betook them to the House of the Face and held high feast therein, for as late as the night was, in honour of this Hunting of the Elk.

No man cared to question Face-of-god closely as to how or where he had strayed from the hunt; for he had told his own tale at once as soon as he came home, to wit, that his right-foot skid-strap had broken, and even while he stopped to mend it came on that drift and weather; and that he could not move from that place without losing his way, and that when it had cleared he knew not whither they had gone because the snow had covered their slot. So he deemed it not unlike that they had gone back, and that he might come up with one or two on the way, and that in any case he wotted well that they could look after themselves; so he turned back, not going very swiftly. All this seemed like enough, and a little matter except to jest about, so no man made any question concerning it: only old Stone-face said to himself:

'Now were I fain to have a true tale out of him, but it is little likely that anything shall come of my much questioning; and it is ill forcing a young man to tell lies.'

So he held his peace, and the feast went on merrily and blithely.

CHAPTER XIV. CONCERNING FACE-OF-GOD AND THE MOUNTAIN.

But it must be told of Gold-mane that what had befallen him was in this wise. His skid-strap brake in good sooth, and he stayed to mend it; but when he had done what was needful, he looked up and saw no man nigh, what for the drift, and that they had gone on somewhat; so he rose to his feet, and without more delay, instead of keeping on toward the elk-ground and the way his face had been set, he turned himself north-and-by-east, and went his ways swiftly towards that áirt, because he deemed that it might lead him to the Mountain-hall where he had guested. He abode not for the storm to clear, but swept off through the thick of it; and indeed the wind was somewhat at his back, so that he went the swiftness. But when the drift

was gotten to its very worst, he sheltered himself for a little in a hollow behind a thorn-bush he stumbled upon. As soon as it began to abate he went on again, and at last when it was quite clear, and the sun shone out, he found himself on a long slope of the fells covered deep with smooth white snow, and at the higher end a great crag rising bare fifty feet above the snow, and more rocks, but none so great, and broken ground as he judged (the snow being deep) about it on the hither side; and on the further, three great pine-trees all bent down and mingled together by their load of snow.

Thitherward he made, as a man might, seeing nothing else to note before him; but he had not made many strides when forth from behind the crag by the pine-trees came a man; and at first Face-of-god thought it might be one of his hunting-fellows gone astray, and he hailed him in a loud voice, but as he looked he saw the sun flash back from a bright helm on the new-comer's head; albeit he kept on his way till there was but a space of two hundred yards between them; when lo! the helm-bearer notched a shaft to his bent bow and loosed at Face-of-god, and the arrow came whistling and passed six inches by his right ear. Then Face-of-god stopped perplexed with his case; for he was on the deep snow in his skids, with his bow unbent, and he knew not how to bend it speedily. He was loth to turn his back and flee, and indeed he scarce deemed that it would help him. Meanwhile of his tarrying the archer loosed again at him, and this time the shaft flew close to his left ear. Then Face-of-god thought to cast himself down into the snow, but he was ashamed; till there came a third shaft which flew over his head amidmost and close to it. 'Good shooting on the Mountain!' muttered he; 'the next shaft will be amidst my breast, and who knows whether the Alderman's handiwork will keep it out.'

So he cried aloud: 'Thou shootest well, brother; but art thou a foe? If thou art, I have a sword by my side, and so hast thou; come hither to me, and let us fight it out friendly if we must needs fight.'

A laugh came down the wind to him clear but somewhat shrill, and the archer came swiftly towards him on his skids with no weapon in his hand save his bow; so that Face-of-god did not draw his sword, but stood wondering.

As they drew nearer he beheld the face of the new-comer, and deemed that he had seen it before; and soon, for all that it was hooded close by the ill-weather raiment, he perceived it to be the face of Bow-may, ruddy and smiling.

She laughed out loud again, as she stopped herself within three feet of him, and said:

'Yea, friend Yellow-hair, we heard of the elks and looked to see thee hereabouts, and I knew thee at once when I came out from behind the crag and saw thee stand bewildered.'

Said Gold-mane: 'Hail to thee, Bow-may! and glad am I to see thee. But thou liest in saying that thou knewest me; else why didst thou shoot those three shafts at me? Surely thou art not so quick as that with all thy friends: these be sharp greetings of you Mountain-folk.'

'Thou lad with the sweet mouth,' she said, 'I like to see thee and hear thee talk, but now must I hasten thy departure; so stand we here no longer. Let us get down into the wood where we can do off our skids and sit down, and then will I tell thee the tidings. Come on!'

And she caught his hand in hers, and they went speedily down the slopes toward the great oak-wood, the wind whistling past their ears.

'Whither are we going?' said he.

Said she: 'I am to show thee the way back home, which thou wilt not know surely amidst this snow. Come, no words! thou shalt not have my tale from me till we are in the wood: so the sooner we are there the sooner shalt thou be pleased.'

So Face-of-god held his peace, and they went on swiftly side by side. But it was not Bow-may's wont to be silent for long, so presently she said:

'Thou art good so do as I bid thee; but see thou, sweet playmate, for all thou art a chieftain's son, thou wert but feather-brained to ask me why I shot at thee. I shoot at thee! that were a fine tale to tell her this even! Or dost thou think that I could shoot at a big man on the snow at two hundred paces and miss him three times? Unless I aimed to miss.'

'Yea, Bow-may,' said he, 'art thou so deft a Bow-may? Thou shalt be in my company whenso I fare to battle.'

'Indeed,' she said, 'therein thou sayest but the bare truth: nowhere else shall I be, and thou shalt find my bow no worse than a good shield.'

He laughed somewhat lightly; but she looked on him soberly and said: 'Laugh in that fash-

ion on the day of battle, and we shall be well content with thee!’

So on they sped very swiftly, for their way was mostly down hill, so that they were soon amongst the outskirting trees of the wood, and presently after reached the edge of the thicket, beyond which the ground was but thinly covered with snow.

There they took off their skids, and went into the thick wood and sat down under a horn-beam tree; and ere Gold-mane could open his mouth to speak Bow-may began and said:

‘Well it was that I fell in with thee, Dalesman, else had there been murders of men to tell of; but ever she ordereth all things wisely, though unwisely hast thou done to seek to her. Hearken! dost thou think that thou hast done well that thou hast me here with my tale? Well, hadst thou busied thyself with the slaying of elks, or with sitting quietly at home, yet shouldest thou have heard my tale, and thou shouldest have seen me in Burgstead in a day or two to tell thee concerning the flitting of the token. And ill it is that I have missed it, for fain had I been to behold the House of the Face, and to have seen thee sitting there in thy dignity amidst the kindred of chieftains.’

And she sighed therewith. But he said: ‘Hold up thine heart, Bow-may! On the word of a true man that shall befall thee one day. But come, playmate, give me thy tale!’

‘Yea,’ she said, ‘I must now tell thee in the wild-wood what else I had told thee in the Hall. Hearken closely, for this is the message:

Seek not to me again till thou hast the token; else assuredly wilt thou be slain, and I shall be sorry for many a day. Thereof as now I may not tell thee more. Now as to the token: When March is worn two weeks fail not to go to and fro on the place of the Maiden Ward for an hour before sunrise every day till thou hear tidings.

‘Now,’ quoth Bow-may, ‘hast thou hearkened and understood?’

‘Yea,’ said he.

She said: ‘Then tell me the words of my message concerning the token.’ And he did so word for word. Then she said:

‘It is well, there is no more to say. Now must I lead thee till thou knowest the wood; and then mayst thou get on to the smooth snow again, and so home merrily. Yet, thou grey-eyed fellow, I will have my pay of thee before I do that last work.’

Therewith she turned about to him and took his head between her hands, and kissed him well favouredly both cheeks and mouth; and she laughed, albeit the tears stood in her eyes as she said: ‘Now smelleth the wood sweeter, and summer will come back again. And even thus will I do once more when we stand side by side in battle array.’

He smiled kindly on her and nodded as they both rose up from the earth: she had taken off her foul-weather gloves while they spake, and he kissed her hand, which was shapely of fashion albeit somewhat brown, and hard of palm, and he said in friendly wise:

‘Thou art a merry faring-fellow, Bow-may, and belike shalt be withal a true fighting-fellow. Come now, thou shalt be my sister and I thy brother, in despite of those three shafts across the snow.’

He laughed therewith; she laughed not, but seemed glad, and said soberly:

‘Yea, I may well be thy sister; for belike I also am of the people of the Gods, who have come into these Dales by many far ways. I am of the House of the Ragged Sword of the Kindred of the Wolf. Come, brother, let us toward Wildlake’s Way.’

Therewith she went before him and led through the thicket as by an assured and wonted path, and he followed hard at heel; but his thought went from her for a while; for those words of brother and sister that he had spoken called to his mind the Bride, and their kindness of little children, and the days when they seemed to have nought to do but to make the sun brighter, and the flowers fairer, and the grass greener, and the birds happier each for the other; and a hard and evil thing it seemed to him that now he should be making all these things nought and dreary to her, now when he had become a man and deeds lay before him. Yet again was he solaced by what Bow-may had said concerning battle to come; for he deemed that she must have had this from the Friend’s foreseeing; and he longed sore for deeds to do, wherein all these things might be cleared up and washen clean as it were.

So passed they through the wood a long way, and it was getting dark therein, and Gold-mane said:

‘Hold now, Bow-may, for I am at home here.’

She looked around and said: ‘Yea, so it is: I was thinking of many things. Farewell and live

merrily till March comes and the token!’

Therewith she turned and went her ways and was soon out of sight, and he went lightly through the wood, and then on skids over the hard snow along the Dale’s edge till he was come to the watch-tower, when the moon was bright in heaven.

Thus was he at Burgstead and the House of the Face betimes, and before the hunters were gotten back.

CHAPTER XV. MURDER AMONGST THE FOLK OF THE WOODLANDERS.

So wore away midwinter tidingless. Stone-face spake no more to Face-of-god about the wood and its wights, when he saw that the young man had come back hale and merry, seemed not to crave over-much to go back thither. As for the Bride, she was sad, and more than misdoubted all; but dauntless as she was in matters that try men’s hardihood, she yet lacked heart to ask of Face-of-god what had befallen him since the autumn-tide, or where he was with her. So she put a force upon herself not to look sad or craving when she was in his company, as full off she was; for he rather sought her than shunned her. For when he saw her thus, he deemed things were changing with her as they had changed with him, and he bethought him of what he had spoken to Bow-may, and deemed that even so he might speak with the Bride when the time came, and that she would not be grieved beyond measure, and all would be well.

Now came on the thaw, and the snow went, and the grass grew all up and down the Dale, and all waters were big. And about this time arose rumours of strange men in the wood, uncouth, vile, and murderous, and many of the feebler sort were made timorous thereby.

But a little before March was born came new tidings from the Woodlanders; to wit: There came on a time to the house of a woodland carle, a worthy goodman well renowned of all, two wayfarers in the first watch of the night; and these men said that they were wending down to the Plain from a far-away dale, Rose-dale to wit, which all men had heard of, and that they had strayed from the way and were exceeding weary, and they craved a meal’s meat and lodging for the night.

This the goodman might nowise gainsay, and he saw no harm in it, wherefore he bade them abide and be merry.

These men, said they who told the tidings, were outlanders, and no man had seen any like them before: they were armed, and bore short bows made of horn, and round targets, and coats-of-fence done over with horn scales; they had crooked swords girt to their sides, and axes of steel forged all in one piece, right good weapons. They were clad in scarlet and had much silver on their raiment and about their weapons, and great rings of the same on their arms; and all this silver seemed brand-new.

Now the Woodland Carle gave them of such things as he had, and was kind and blithe to them: there were in his house besides himself five men of his sons and kindred, and his wife and three daughters and two other maids. So they feasted after the Woodlanders’ fashion, and went to bed a little before midnight. Two hours after, the carle awoke and heard a little stir, and he looked and saw the guests on their feet amidst the hall clad in all their war-gear; and they had betwixt them his two youngest daughters, maids of fifteen and twelve winters, and had bound their hands and done clouts over their mouths, so that they might not cry out; and they were just at point to carry them off. Thereat the goodman, naked as he was, caught up his sword and made at these murder-carles, and or ever they were ware of him he had hewn down one and turned to face the other, who smote at him with his steel axe and gave him a great wound on the shoulder, and therewithal fled out at the open door and forth into the wood.

The Woodlander made no stay to raise the cry (there was no need, for the hall was astir now from end to end, and men getting to their weapons), but ran out after the felon even as he was; and, in spite of his grievous hurt, overran him no long way from the house before he had gotten into the thicket. But the man was nimble and strong, and the goodman unsteady from his wound, and by then the others of the household came up with the hue and cry he had gotten two more sore wounds and was just making an end of throttling the felon with his bare hands. So he fell into their arms fainting from weakness, and for all they could do he died in two hours’ time from that axe-wound in his shoulder, and another on the side of the head, and a knife-thrust in his side; and he was a man of sixty winters.

But the stranger he had slain outright; and the one whom he had smitten in the hall died

before the dawn, thrusting all help aside, and making no sound of speech.

When these tidings came to Burgstead they seemed great to men, and to Gold-mane more than all. So he and many others took their weapons and fared up to Wildlake's Way, and so came to the Woodland Carles. But the Woodlanders had borne out the carcasses of those felons and laid them on the green before Wood-grey's door (for that was the name of the dead goodman), and they were saying that they would not bury such accursed folk, but would bear them a little way so that they should not be vexed with the stink of them, and cast them into the thicket for the wolf and the wild-cat and the stoat to deal with; and they should lie there, weapons and silver and all; and they deemed it base to strip such wretches, for who would wear their raiment or bear their weapons after them.

There was a great ring of folk round about them when they of Burgstead drew near, and they shouted for joy to see their neighbours, and made way before them. Then the Dalesmen cursed these murderers who had slain so good a man, and they all praised his manliness, whereas he ran out into the night naked and wounded after his foe, and had fallen like his folk of old time.

It was a bright spring afternoon in that clearing of the Wood, and they looked at the two dead men closely; and Gold-mane, who had been somewhat silent and moody till then, became merry and wordy; for he beheld the men and saw that they were utterly strange to him: they were short of stature, crooked-legged, long-armed, very strong for their size: with small blue eyes, snubbed-nosed, wide-mouthed, thin-lipped, very swarthy of skin, exceeding foul of favour. He and all others wondered who they were, and whence they came, for never had they seen their like; and the Woodlanders, who often guested outlanders strayed from the way of divers kindreds and nations, said also that none such had they ever seen. But Stone-face, who stood by Gold-mane, shook his head and quoth he:

'The Wild-wood holdeth many marvels, and these be of them: the spawn of evil wights quickeneth therein, and at other whiles it melteth away again like the snow; so may it be with these carcasses.'

And some of the older folk of the Woodlanders who stood by hearkened what he said, and deemed his words wise, for they remembered their ancient lore and many a tale of old time.

Thereafter they of Burgstead went into Wood-grey's hall, or as many of them as might, for it was but a poor place and not right great. There they saw the goodman laid on the daïs in all his war-gear, under the last tie-beam of his hall, whereon was carved amidst much goodly work of knots and flowers and twining stems the image of the Wolf of the Waste, his jaws open and gaping; the wife and daughters of the goodman and other women of the folk stood about the bier singing some old song in a low voice, and some sobbing therewithal, for the man was much beloved: and much people of the Woodlanders was in the hall, and it was somewhat dusk within.

So the Burgstead men greeted that folk kindly and humbly, and again they fell to praising the dead man, saying how his deed should long be remembered in the Dale and wide about; and they called him a fearless man and of great worth. And the women hearkened, and ceased their crooning and their sobbing, and stood up proudly and raised their heads with gleaming eyes; and as the words of the Burgstead men ended, they lifted up their voices and sang loudly and clearly, standing together in a row, ten of them, on the daïs of that poor hall, facing the gable and the wolf-adorned tie-beam, heeding nought as they sang what was about or behind them.

And this is some of what they sang:

Why sit ye bare in the spinning-room?
 Why weave ye naked at the loom?
 Bare and white as the moon we be,
 That the Earth and the drifting night may see.
 Now what is the worst of all your work?
 What curse amidst the web shall lurk?
 The worst of the work our hands shall win
 Is wrack and ruin round the kin.
 Shall the woollen yarn and the flaxen thread
 Be gear for living men or dead?
 The woollen yarn and the flaxen thread
 Shall flare 'twixt living men and dead.
 O what is the ending of your day?
 When shall ye rise and wend away?
 Our day shall end to-morrow morn,
 When we hear the voice of the battle-horn.

Where first shall eyes of men behold
 This weaving of the moonlight cold?
 There where the alien host abides
 The gathering on the Mountain-sides.
 How long aloft shall the fair web fly
 When the bows are bent and the spears draw nigh?
 From eve to morn and morn till eve
 Aloft shall fly the work we weave.
 What then is this, the web ye win?
 What wood-beast waxeth stark therein?
 We weave the Wolf and the gift of war
 From the men that were to the men that are.

So sang they: and much were all men moved at their singing, and there was none but called to mind the old days of the Fathers, and the years when their banner went wide in the world.

But the Woodlanders feasted them of Burgstead what they might, and then went the Dalesmen back to their houses; but on the morrow's morrow they fared thither again, and Woodgrey was laid in mound amidst a great assemblage of the Folk.

Many men said that there was no doubt that those two felons were of the company of those who had ransacked the steeds of Penny-thumb and Harts-bane; and so at first deemed Bristler the son of Brightling; but after a while, when he had had time to think of it, he changed his mind; for he said that such men as these would have slain first and ransacked afterwards: and some who loved neither Penny-thumb nor Harts-bane said that they would not have been at the pains to choose for ransacking the two worst men about the Dale, whose loss was no loss to any but themselves.

As for Gold-mane he knew not what to think, except that his friends of the Mountain had had nought to do with it.

So wore the days awhile.

CHAPTER XVI. THE BRIDE SPEAKETH WITH FACE-OF-GOD.

February had died into March, and March was now twelve days old, on a fair and sunny day an hour before noon; and Face-of-god was in a meadow a scant mile down the Dale from Burgstead. He had been driving a bull into a goodman's byre nearby, and had had to spend toil and patience both in getting him out of the fields and into the byre; for the beast was hot with the spring days and the new grass. So now he was resting himself in happy mood in an exceeding pleasant place, a little meadow to wit, on one side whereof was a great orchard or grove of sweet chestnuts, which went right up to the feet of the Southern Cliffs: across the meadow ran a clear brook towards the Weltering Water, free from big stones, in some places dammed up for the flooding of the deep pasture-meadow, and with the grass growing on its lips down to the very water. There was a low bank just outside the chestnut trees, as if someone had raised a dyke about them when they were young, which had been trodden low and spreading through the lapse of years by the faring of many men and beasts. The primroses bloomed thick upon it now, and here and there along it was a low blackthorn bush in full blossom; from the mid-meadow and right down to the lip of the brook was the grass well nigh hidden by the blossoms of the meadow-saffron, with daffodils sprinkled about amongst them, and in the trees and bushes the birds, and chiefly the blackbirds, were singing their loudest.

There sat Face-of-god on the bank resting after his toil, and happy was his mood; since in two days' wearing he should be pacing the Maiden Ward awaiting the token that was to lead him to Shadowy Vale; so he sat calling to mind the Friend as he had last seen her, and striving as it were to set her image standing on the flowery grass before him, till all the beauty of the meadow seemed bare and empty to him without her. Then it fell into his mind that this had been a beloved trysting-place betwixt him and the Bride, and that often when they were little would they come to gather chestnuts in the grove, and thereafter sit and prattle on the old dyke; or in spring when the season was warm would they go barefoot into the brook, seeking its treasures of troutlets and flowers and clean-washed agate pebbles. Yea, and time not long ago had they met here to talk as lovers, and sat on that very bank in all the kindness of good days without a blemish, and both he and she had loved the place well for its wealth of blossoms and deep grass and goodly trees and clear running stream.

As he thought of all this, and how often there he had praised to himself her beauty, which he scarce dared praise to her, he frowned and slowly rose to his feet, and turned toward the

chestnut-grove, as though he would go thence that way; but or ever he stepped down from the dyke he turned about again, and even therewith, like the very image and ghost of his thought, lo! the Bride herself coming up from out the brook and wending toward him, her wet naked feet gleaming in the sun as they trod down the tender meadow-saffron and brushed past the tufts of daffodils. He stood staring at her discomforted, for on that day he had much to think of that seemed happy to him, and he deemed that she would now question him, and his mind pondered divers ways of answering her, and none seemed good to him. She drew near and let her skirts fall over her feet, and came to him, her gown hem dragging over the flowers: then she stood straight up before him and greeted him, but reached not forth her hand to him nor touched him. Her face was paler than its wont, and her voice trembled as she spake to him and said:

‘Face-of-god, I would ask thee a gift.’

‘All gifts,’ he said, ‘that thou mayest ask, and I may give, lie open to thee.’

She said: ‘If I be alive when the time comes this gift thou mayst well give me.’

‘Sweet kinswoman,’ said he, ‘tell me what it is that thou wouldest have of me.’ And he was ill-at-ease as he waited for her answer.

She said: ‘Ah, kinsman, kinsman! Woe on the day that maketh kinship accursed to me because thou desirest it!’

He held his peace and was exceeding sorry; and she said:

‘This is the gift that I ask of thee, that in the days to come when thou art wedded, thou wilt give me the second man-child whom thou begettest.’

He said: ‘This shalt thou have, and would that I might give thee much more. Would that we were little children together other again, as when we played here in other days.’

She said: ‘I would have a token of thee that thou shalt show to the God, and swear on it to give me the gift. For the times change.’

‘What token wilt thou have?’ said he.

She said: ‘When next thou farest to the Wood, thou shalt bring me back, it maybe a flower from the bank ye sit upon, or a splinter from the daïs of the hall wherein ye feast, or maybe a ring or some matter that the strangers are wont to wear. That shall be the token.’

She spoke slowly, hanging her head adown, but she lifted it presently and looked into his face and said:

‘Woe’s me, woe’s me, Gold-mane! How evil is this day, when bewailing me I may not bewail thee also! For I know that thine heart is glad. All through the winter have I kept this hidden in my heart, and durst not speak to thee. But now the spring-tide hath driven me to it. Let summer come, and who shall say?’

Great was his grief, and his shame kept him silent, and he had no word to say; and again she said:

‘Tell me, Gold-mane, when goest thou thither?’

He said: ‘I know not surely, may happen in two days, may happen in ten. Why askest thou?’

‘O friend!’ she said, ‘is it a new thing that I should ask thee whither thou goest and whence thou comest, and the times of thy coming and going. Farewell to-day! Forget not the token. Woe’s me, that I may not kiss thy fair face!’

She spread her arms abroad and lifted up her face as one who waileth, but no sound came from her lips; then she turned about and went away as she had come.

But as for him he stood there after she was gone in all confusion, as if he were undone: for he felt his manhood lessened that he should thus and so sorely have hurt a friend, and in a manner against his will. And yet he was somewhat wroth with her, that she had come upon him so suddenly, and spoken to him with such mastery, and in so few words, and he with none to make answer to her, and that she had so marred his pleasure and his hope of that fair day. Then he sat him down again on the flowery bank, and little by little his heart softened, and he once more called to mind many a time when they had been there before, and the plays and the games they had had together there when they were little. And he bethought him of the days that were long to him then, and now seemed short to him, and as if they were all grown together into one story, and that a sweet one. Then his breast heaved with a sob, and the tears rose to his eyes and burned and stung him, and he fell a-weeping for that sweet tale, and wept as he had wept once before on that old dyke when there had been some child’s

quarrel between them, and she had gone away and left him.

Then after a while he ceased his weeping, and looked about him lest anyone might be coming, and then he arose and went to and fro in the chestnut-grove for a good while, and afterwards went his ways from that meadow, saying to himself: 'Yet remaineth to me the morrow of to-morrow, and that is the first of the days of the watching for the token.'

But all that day he was slow to meet the eyes of men; and in the hall that eve he was silent and moody; for from time to time it came over him that some of his manhood had departed from him.

CHAPTER XVII. THE TOKEN COMETH FROM THE MOUNTAIN.

The next day wore away tidingless; and the day after Face-of-god arose betimes; for it was the first day of his watch, and he was at the Maiden Ward before the time appointed on a very fair and bright morning, and he went to and fro on that place, and had no tidings. So he came away somewhat cast down, and said within himself: 'Is it but a lie and a mocking when all is said?'

On the morrow he went thither again, and the morn was wild and stormy with drift of rain, and low clouds hurrying over the earth, though for the sunrise they lifted a little in the east, and the sun came up over the passes, amidst the red and angry rack of clouds. This morn also gave him no tidings of the token, and he was wroth and perturbed in spirit: but towards evening he said:

'It is well: ten days she gave me, so that she might be able to send without fail on one of them; she will not fail me.'

So again on the morrow he was there betimes, and the morn was windy as on the day before, but the clouds higher and of better promise for the day. Face-of-god walked to and fro on the Maiden Ward, and as he turned toward Burgstead for the tenth time, he heard, as he deemed, a bow-string twang afar off, and even therewith came a shaft flying heavily like a winged bird, which smote a great standing stone on the other side of the way, where of old some chieftain had been buried, and fell to earth at its foot. He went up to it and handled it, and saw that there was a piece of thin parchment wrapped about it, which indeed he was eager to unwrap at once, but forebore; because he was on the highway, and people were already astir, and even then passed by him a goodman of the Dale with a man of his going afield together, and they gave him the sele of the day. So he went along the highway a little till he came to a place where was a footbridge over into the meadow. He crossed thereby and went swiftly till he reached a rising ground grown over with hazel-trees; there he sat down among the rabbit-holes, the primrose and wild-garlic blooming about him, and three blackbirds answering one another from the edges of the coppice. Straightway when he had looked and seen none coming he broke the threads that were wound about the scroll and the arrow, and unrolled the parchment; and there was writing thereon in black ink of small letters, but very fair, and this is what he read therein:

Come thou to the Mountain Hall by the path which thou knowest of; on the morrow of the day whereon thou redest this. Rise betimes and come armed, for there are other men than we in the wood; to whom thy death should be a gain. When thou art come to the Hall, thou shalt find no man therein; but a great hound only, tied to a bench nigh the daïs. Call him by his name, Sure-foot to wit, and give him to eat from the meat upon the board, and give him water to drink. If the day is then far spent, as it is like to be, abide thou with the hound in the hall through the night, and eat of what thou shalt find there; but see that the hound fares not abroad till the morrow's morn: then lead him out and bring him to the north-east corner of the Hall, and he shall lift the slot for thee that leadeth to the Shadowy Yale. Follow him and all good go with thee.

Now when he had read this, earth seemed fair indeed about him, and he scarce knew whither to turn or what to do to make the most of his joy. He presently went back to Burgstead and into the House of the Face, where all men were astir now, and the day was clearing. He hid the shaft under his kirtle, for he would not that any should see it; so he went to his shut-bed and laid it up in his chest, wherein he kept his chiefest treasures; but the writing on the scroll he set in his bosom and so hid it. He went joyfully and proudly, as one who knoweth more tidings and better than those around him. But Stone-face beheld him, and said 'Foster-son, thou art happy. Is it that the spring-tide is in thy blood, and maketh thee blithe with all things, or hast thou some new tidings? Nay, I would not have an answer out of thee; but here is good rede: when next thou goest into the wood, it were nought so ill for thee to have a valiant old carle by thy side; one that loveth thee, and would die for thee if need were; one who might watch when thou wert seeking. Or else beware! for there are evil things abroad in the Wood,

and moreover the brethren of those two felons who were slain at Carlstead.'

Then Gold-mane constrained himself to answer the old carle softly; and he thanked him kindly for his offer, and said that so it should be before long. So the talk between them fell, and Stone-face went away somewhat well-pleased.

And now was Face-of-god become wary; and he would not draw men's eyes and speech on him; so he went afield with Hall-face to deal with the lambs and the ewes, and did like other men. No less wary was he in the hall that even, and neither spake much nor little; and when his father spake to him concerning the Bride, and made game of him as a somewhat sluggish groom, he did not change countenance, but answered lightly what came to hand.

On the morrow ere the earliest dawn he was afoot, and he clad himself and did on his hauberk, his father's work, which was fine-wrought and a stout defence, and reached down to his knees; and over that he did on a goodly green kirtle well embroidered: he girt his war-sword to his side, and it was the work of his father's father, and a very good sword: its name was Dale-warden. He did a good helm on his head, and slung a targe at his back, and took two spears in his hand, short but strong-shafted and well-steeled. Thus arrayed he left Burgstead before the dawn, and came to Wildlake's Way and betook him to the Woodland. He made no stop or stay on the path, but ate his meat standing by an oak-tree close by the half-blind track. When he came to the little wood-lawn, where was the toft of the ancient house, he looked all round about him, for he deemed that a likely place for those ugly wood-wights to set on him; but nought befell him, though he stooped and drank of the woodland rill warily enough. So he passed on; and there were other places also where he fared warily, because they seemed like to hold lurking felons; though forsooth the whole wood might well serve their turn. But no evil befell him, and at last, when it yet lacked an hour to sunset, he came to the wood-lawn where Wild-wearer had made his onset that other eve.

He went straight up to the house, his heart beating, and he scarce believing but that he should find the Friend abiding him there: but when he pushed the door it gave way before him at once, and he entered and found no man therein, and the walls stripped bare and no shield or weapon hanging on the panels. But the hound he saw tied to a bench nigh the daïs, and the bristles on the beast's neck arose, and he snarled on Face-of-god, and strained on his leathern leash. Then Face-of-god went up to him and called him by his name, Sure-foot, and gave him his hand to lick, and he brought him water, and fed him with flesh from the meat on the board; so the beast became friendly and wagged his tail and whined and slobbered his hand.

Then he went all about the house, and saw and heard no living thing therein save the mice in the panels and Sure-foot. So he came back to the daïs, and sat him down at the board and ate his fill, and thought concerning his case. And it came into his mind that the Woman of the Mountain had some deed for him to do which would try his manliness and exalt his fame; and his heart rose high and he was glad, and he saw himself sitting beside her on the daïs of a very fair hall beloved and honoured of all the folk, and none had aught to say against him or owed him any grudge. Thus he pleased himself in thinking of the good days to come, sitting there till the hall grew dusk and dark and the night-wind moaned about it.

Then after a while he arose and raked together the brands on the hearth, and made light in the hall and looked to the door. And he found there were bolts and bars thereto, so he shot the bolts and drew the bars into their places and made all as sure as might be. Then he brought Sure-foot down from the daïs, and tied him up so that he might lie down athwart the door, and then lay down his hauberk with his naked sword ready to his hand, and slept long while.

When he awoke it was darker than when he had lain him for the moon had set; yet he deemed that the day was at point of breaking. So he fetched water and washed the night off him, and saw a little glimmer of the dawn. Then he ate somewhat of the meat on the board, and did on his helm and his other gear, and unbarred the door, and led Sure-foot without, and brought him to the north-east corner of the house, and in a little while he lifted the slot and they departed, the man and the hound, just as broke dawn from over the mountains.

Sure-foot led right into the heart of the pine-wood, and it was dark enough therein, with nought but a feeble glimmer for some while, and long was the way therethrough; but in two hours' space was there something of a break, and they came to the shore of a dark deep tarn on whose windless and green waters the daylight shone fully. The hound skirted the water, and led on unchecked till the trees began to grow smaller and the air colder for all that the

sun was higher; for they had been going up and up all the way.

So at last after a six hours' journey they came clean out of the pine-wood, and before them lay the black wilderness of the bare mountains, and beyond them, looking quite near now, the great ice-peaks, the wall of the world. It was but an hour short of noon by this time, and the high sun shone down on a barren boggy moss which lay betwixt them and the rocky waste. Sure-foot made no stay, but threaded the ways that went betwixt the quagmires, and in another hour led Face-of-god into a winding valley blinded by great rocks, and everywhere stony and rough, with a trickle of water running amidst of it. The hound fared on up the dale to where the water was bridged by a great fallen stone, and so over it and up a steep bent on the further side, on to a marvellously rough mountain-neck, whiles mere black sand cumbered with scattered rocks and stones, whiles beset with mires grown over with the cottony mire-grass; here and there a little scanty grass growing; elsewhere nought but dwarf willow ever dying ever growing, mingled with moss or red-blossomed sengreen; and all blending together into mere desolation.

Few living things they saw there; up on the neck a few sheep were grazing the scanty grass, but there was none to tend them; yet Face-of-god deemed the sight of them good, for there must be men anigh who owned them. For the rest, the whimbrel laughed across the mires; high up in heaven a great eagle was hanging; once and again a grey fox leapt up before them, and the heath-fowl whirred up from under Face-of-god's feet. A raven who was sitting croaking on a rock in that first dale stirred uneasily on his perch as he saw them, and when they were passed flapped his wings and flew after them croaking still.

Now they fared over that neck somewhat east, making but slow way because the ground was so broken and rocky; and in another hour's space Sure-foot led down-hill due east to where the stony neck sank into another desolate miry heath still falling toward the east, but whose further side was walled by a rampart of crags cleft at their tops into marvellous-shapes, coal-black, ungrassed and unmossed. Thitherward the hound led straight, and Gold-mane followed wondering: as he drew near them he saw that they were not very high, the tallest peak scant fifty feet from the face of the heath.

They made their way through the scattered rocks at the foot of these crags, till, just where the rock-wall seemed the closest, the way through the stones turned into a path going through it skew-wise; and it was now so clear a path that belike it had been bettered by men's hands. Down thereby Face-of-god followed the hound, deeming that he was come to the gates of the Shadowy Vale, and the path went down steeply and swiftly. But when he had gone down a while, the rocks on his right hand sank lower for a space, so that he could look over and see what lay beneath.

There lay below him a long narrow vale quite plain at the bottom, walled on the further side as on the hither by sheer rocks of black stone. The plain was grown over with grass, but he could see no tree therein: a deep river, dark and green, ran through the vale, sometimes through its midmost, sometimes lapping the further rock-wall: and he thought indeed that on many a day in the year the sun would never shine on that valley.

Thus much he saw, and then the rocks rose again and shut it from his sight; and at last they drew so close together over head that he was in a way going through a cave with little daylight coming from above, and in the end he was in a cave indeed and mere darkness: but with the last feeble glimmer of light he thought he saw carved on a smooth space of the living rock at his left hand the image of a wolf.

This cave lasted but a little way, and soon the hound and the man were going once more between sheer black rocks, and the path grew steeper yet and was cut into steps. At last there was a sharp turn, and they stood on the top of a long stony scree, down which Sure-foot bounded eagerly, giving tongue as he went; but Face-of-god stood still and looked, for now the whole Dale lay open before him.

That river ran from north to south, and at the south end the cliffs drew so close to it that looking thence no outgate could be seen; but at the north end there was as it were a dreary street of rocks, the river flowing amidmost and leaving little foothold on either side, somewhat as it was with the pass leading from the mountains into Burgdale.

Amidmost of the Dale a little toward the north end he saw a doom-ring of black stones, and hard by it an ancient hall builded of the same black stone both wall and roof, and thitherward was Sure-foot now running. Face-of-god looked up and down the Dale and could see no break in the wall of sheer rock: toward the southern end he saw a few booths and cots built roughly

of stone and thatched with turf; thereabout he saw a few folk moving about, the most of whom seemed to be women and children; there were some sheep and lambs near these cots, and a herd of fifty or so of somewhat goodly mountain-kine were feeding higher up the valley. He could look down into the river from where he stood, and he saw that it ran between rocky banks going straight down from the face of the meadow, which was rather high above the water, so that it seemed little likely that the water should rise over its banks, either in summer or winter; and in summer was it like to be highest, because the vale was so near to the high mountains and their snows.

CHAPTER XVIII. FACE-OF-GOD TALKETH WITH THE FRIEND IN SHADOWY VALE.

It was now about two hours after noon, and a broad band of sunlight lay upon the grass of the vale below Gold-mane's feet; he went lightly down the scree, and strode forward over the level grass toward the Doom-ring, his helm and war-gear glittering bright in the sun. He must needs go through the Doom-ring to come to the Hall, and as he stepped out from behind the last of the big upright-stones, he saw a woman standing on the threshold of the Hall-door, which was but some score of paces from him, and knew her at once for the Friend.

She was clad like himself in a green kirtle gaily embroidered and fitting close to her body, and had no gown or cloak over it; she had a golden fillet on her head beset with blue mountain stones, and her hair hung loose behind her.

Her beauty was so exceeding, and so far beyond all memory of her that his mind had held, that once more fear of her fell upon Face-of-god, and he stood still with beating heart till she should speak to him. But she came forward swiftly with both her hands held out, smiling and happy-faced, and looking very kindly on him, and she took his hands and said to him:

'Now welcome, Gold-mane, welcome, Face-of-god! and twice welcome art thou and three-fold. Lo! this is the day that thou asked for: art thou happy in it?'

He lifted her hands to his lips and kissed them timorously, but said nought; and therewithal Sure-foot came running forth from the Hall, and fell to bounding round about them, barking noisily after the manner of dogs who have met their masters again; and still she held his hands and beheld him kindly. Then she called the hound to her, and patted him on the neck and quieted him, and then turned to Face-of-god and laughed happily and said:

'I do not bid thee hold thy peace; yet thou sayest nought. Is well with thee?'

'Yea,' he said, 'and more than well.'

'Thou seemest to me a goodly warrior,' she said; 'hast thou met any foemen yesterday or this morning?'

'Nay,' said he, 'none hindered me; thou hast made the ways easy to me.'

She said soberly, 'Such as I might do, I did. But we may not wield everything, for our foes are many, and I feared for thee. But come thou into our house, which is ours, and far more ours than the booth before the pine-wood.'

She took his hand again and led him toward the door, but Face-of-god looked up, and above the lintel he saw carved on the dark stone that image of the Wolf, even as he had seen it carved on Wood-grey's tie-beam; and therewith such thoughts came into his mind that he stopped to look, pressing the Friend's hand hard as though bidding her note it. The stone wherein the image was carved was darker than the other building stones, and might be called black; the jaws of the wood-beast were open and gaping, and had been painted with cinnabar, but wind and weather had worn away the most of the colour.

Spake the Friend: 'So it is: thou beholdest the token of the God and Father of our Fathers, that telleth the tale of so many days, that the days which now pass by us be to them but as the drop in the sea of waters. Thou beholdest the sign of our sorrow, the memory of our wrong; yet it is also the token of our hope. Maybe it shall lead thee far.'

'Whither?' said he. But she answered not a great while, and he looked at her as she stood a-gazing on the image, and saw how the tears stole out of her eyes and ran adown her cheeks. Then again came the thought to him of Wood-grey's hall, and the women of the kindred standing before the Wolf and singing of him; and though there was little comeliness in them and she was so exceeding beauteous, he could not but deem that they were akin to her.

But after a while she wiped the tears from her face and turned to him and said: 'My friend,

the Wolf shall lead thee no-whither but where I also shall be, whatsoever peril or grief may beset the road or lurk at the ending thereof. Thou shalt be no thrall, to labour while I look on.'

His heart swelled within him as she spoke, and he was at point to beseech her love that moment; but now her face had grown gay and bright again, and she said while he was gathering words to speak withal:

'Come in, Gold-mane, come into our house; for I have many things to say to thee. And moreover thou art so hushed, and so fearsome in thy mail, that I think thou yet deemest me to be a Wight of the Waste, such as Stone-face thy Fosterer told thee tales of, and forewarned thee. So would I eat before thee, and sign the meat with the sign of the Earth-god's Hammer, to show thee that he is in error concerning me, and that I am a very woman flesh and fell, as my kindred were before me.'

He laughed and was exceeding glad, and said: 'Tell me now, kind friend, dost thou deem that Stone-face's tales are mere mockery of his dreams, and that he is beguiled by empty semblances or less? Or are there such Wights in the Waste.'

'Nay,' she said, 'the man is a true man; and of these things are there many ancient tales which we may not doubt. Yet so it is that such wights have I never yet seen, nor aught to scare me save evil men: belike it is that I have been over-much busied in dealing with sorrow and ruin to look after them: or it may be that they feared me and the wrath-breeding grief of the kindred.'

He looked at her earnestly, and the wisdom of her heart seemed to enter into his; but she said: 'It is of men we must talk, and of me and thee. Come with me, my friend.'

And she stepped lightly over the threshold and drew him in. The Hall was stern and grim and somewhat dusky, for its windows were but small: it was all of stone, both walls and roof. There was no timber-work therein save the benches and chairs, a little about the doors at the lower end that led to the buttery and out-bowers; and this seemed to have been wrought of late years; yea, the chairs against the gable on the daïs were of stone built into the wall, adorned with carving somewhat sparingly, the image of the Wolf being done over the midmost of them. He looked up and down the Hall, and deemed it some seventy feet over all from end to end; and he could see in the dimness those same goodly hangings on the wall which he had seen in the woodland booth.

She led him up to the daïs, and stood there leaning up against the arm of one of those stone seats silent for a while; then she turned and looked at him, and said:

'Yea, thou lookest a goodly warrior; yet am I glad that thou camest hither without battle. Tell me, Gold-mane,' she said, taking one of his spears from his hand, 'art thou deft with the spear?'

'I have been called so,' said he.

She looked at him sweetly and said: 'Canst thou show me the feat of spear-throwing in this Hall, or shall we wend outside presently that I may see thee throw?'

'The Hall sufficeth,' he said. 'Shall I set this steel in the lintel of the buttery door yonder?'

'Yea, if thou canst,' she said.

He smiled and took the spear from her, and poised it and shook it till it quivered again, then suddenly drew back his arm and cast, and the shaft sped whistling down the dim hall, and smote the aforesaid door-lintel and stuck there quivering: then he sprang down from the daïs, and ran down the hall, and put forth his hand and pulled it forth from the wood, and was on the daïs again in a trice, and cast again, and the second time set the spear in the same place, and then took his other spear from the board and cast it, and there stood the two staves in the wood side by side; then he went soberly down the hall and drew them both out of the wood and came back to her, while she stood watching him, her cheek flushed, her lips a little parted.

She said: 'Good spear-casting, forsooth! and far above what our folk can do, who be no great throwers of the spear.'

Gold-mane laughed: 'Sooth is that,' said he, 'or hardly were I here to teach thee spear-throwing.'

'Wilt thou *never* be paid for that simple onslaught?' she said.

'Have I been paid then?' said he.

She reddened, for she remembered her word to him on the mountain; and he put his hand on her shoulder and kissed her cheek, but timorously; nor did she withstand him or shrink

aback, but said soberly:

‘Good indeed is thy spear-throwing, and meseems my brother will love thee when he hath seen thee strike a stroke or two in wrath. But, fair warrior, there be no foemen here: so get thee to the lower end of the Hall, and in the bower beyond shalt thou find fresh water; there wash the waste from off thee, and do off thine helm and hauberk, and come back speedily and eat with me; for I hunger, and so dost thou.’

He did as she bade him, and came back presently bearing in his hand both helm and hauberk, and he looked light-limbed and trim and lissome, an exceeding goodly man.

CHAPTER XIX. THE FAIR WOMAN TELLETH FACE-OF-GOD OF HER KINDRED.

When he came back to the dais he saw that there was meat upon the board, and the Friend said to him:

‘Now art thou Gold-mane indeed: but come now, sit by me and eat, though the Wood-woman giveth thee but a sorry banquet, O guest; but from the Dale it is, and we be too far now from the dwellings of men to have delicate meat on the board, though to-night when they come back thy cheer shall be better. Yet even then thou shalt have no such dainties as Stone-face hath imagined for thee at the hands of the Wood-wight.’

She laughed therewith, and he no less; and in sooth the meat was but simple, of curds and new cheese, meat of the herdsmen. But Face-of-god said gaily: ‘Sweet it shall be to me; good is all that the Friend giveth.’

Then she raised her hand and made the sign of the Hammer over the board, and looked up at him and said:

‘Hath the Earth-god changed my face, Gold-mane, to what I verily am?’

He held his face close to hers and looked into it, and him-seemed it was as pure as the waters of a mountain lake, and as fine and well-wrought every deal of it as when his father had wrought in his stithy many days and fashioned a small piece of great mastery. He was ashamed to kiss her again, but he said to himself, ‘This is the fairest woman of the world, whom I have sworn to wed this year.’ Then he spake aloud and said:

‘I see the face of the Friend, and it will not change to me.’

Again she reddened a little, and the happy look in her face seemed to grow yet sweeter, and he was bewildered with longing and delight.

But she stood up and went to an ambry in the wall and brought forth a horn shod and lipped with silver of ancient fashion, and she poured wine into it and held it forth and said:

‘O guest from the Dale, I pledge thee! and when thou hast drunk to me in turn we will talk of weighty matters. For indeed I bear hopes in my hands too heavy for the daughters of men to bear; and thou art a chieftain’s son, and mayst well help me to bear them; so let us talk simply and without guile, as folk that trust one another.’

So she drank and held out the horn to him, and he took the horn and her hand both, and he kissed her hand and said:

‘Here in this Hall I drink to the Sons of the Wolf, whosoever they be.’ Therewith he drank and he said: ‘Simply and guilelessly indeed will I talk with thee; for I am weary of lies, and for thy sake have I told a many.’

‘Thou shalt tell no more,’ she said; ‘and as for the health thou hast drunk, it is good, and shall profit thee. Now sit we here in these ancient seats and let us talk.’

So they sat them down while the sun was westering in the March afternoon, and she said:

‘Tell me first what tidings have been in the Dale.’

So he told her of the ransackings and of the murder at Carlstead.

She said: ‘These tidings have we heard before, and some deal of them we know better than ye do, or can; for we were the ransackers of Penny-thumb and Harts-bane. Thereof will I say more presently. What other tidings hast thou to tell of? What oaths were sworn upon the Boar last Yule?’

So he told her of the oath of Bristler the son of Brightling. She smiled and said: ‘He shall keep his oath, and yet redden no blade.’

Then he told of his father’s oath, and she said:

‘It is good; but even so would he do and no oath sworn. All men may trust Iron-face. And

thou, my friend, what oath didst thou swear?’

His face grew somewhat troubled as he said: ‘I swore to wed the fairest woman in the world, though the Dalesmen gainsaid me, and they beyond the Dale.’

‘Yea,’ she said, ‘and there is no need to ask thee whom thou didst mean by thy “fairest woman,” for I have seen that thou deemest me fair enough. My friend, maybe thy kindred will be against it, and the kindred of the Bride; and it might be that my kindred would have gainsaid it if things were not as they are. But though all men gainsay it, yet will not I. It is meet and right that we twain wed.’

She spake very soberly and quietly, but when she had spoken there was nothing in his heart but joy and gladness: yet shame of her loveliness refrained him, and he cast down his eyes before hers. Then she said in a kind voice:

‘I know thee, how glad thou art of this word of mine, because thou lookest on me with eyes of love, and thinkest of me as better than I am; though I am no ill woman and no beguiler. But this is not all that I have to say to thee, though it be much; for there are more folk in the world than thou and I only. But I told thee this first, that thou mightest trust me in all things. So, my friend, if thou canst, refrain thy joy and thy longing a little, and hearken to what concerneth thee and me, and thy people and mine.’

‘Fair woman and sweet friend,’ he said, ‘thou knowest of a gladness which is hard to bear if one must lay it aside for a while; and of a longing which is hard to refrain if it mingle with another longing—knowest thou not?’

‘Yea,’ she said, ‘I know it.’

‘Yet,’ said Face-of-god, ‘I will forbear as thou biddest me. Tell me, then, what were the felons who were slain at Carlstead? Knowest thou of them?’

‘Over well,’ she said, ‘they are our foes this many a year; and since we met last autumn they have become foes of you Dalesmen also. Soon shall ye have tidings of them; and it was against them that I bade thee arm yesterday.’

Said Face-of-god: ‘Is it against them that thou wouldst have us do battle along with thy folk?’

‘So it is,’ she said; ‘no other foemen have we. And now, Gold-mane, thou art become a friend of the Wolf, and shalt before long be of affinity with our House; that other day thou didst ask me to tell thee of me and mine, and now will I do according to thine asking. Short shall my tale be; because maybe thou shalt hear it told again, and in goodly wise, before thine whole folk.

‘As thou wottest we be now outlaws and Wolves’ Heads; and whiles we lift the gear of men, but ever if we may of ill men and not of good; there is no worthy Goodman of the Dale from whom we would take one hoof, or a skin of wine, or a cake of wax.

‘Wherefore are we outlaws? Because we have been driven from our own, and we bore away our lives and our weapons, and little else; and for our lands, thou seest this Vale in the howling wilderness and how narrow and poor it is, though it hath been the nurse of warriors in time past.

‘Hearken! Time long ago came the kindred of the Wolf to these Mountains of the World; and they were in a pass in the stony maze and the utter wilderness of the Mountains, and the foe was behind them in numbers not to be borne up against. And so it befell that the pass forked, and there were two ways before our Folk; and one part of them would take the way to the north and the other the way to the south; and they could not agree which way the whole Folk should take. So they sundered into two companies, and one took one way and one another. Now as to those who fared by the southern road, we knew not what befell them, nor for long and long had we any tale of them.

‘But we who took the northern road, we happened on this Vale amidst the wilderness, and we were weary of fleeing from the over-mastering foe; and the dale seemed enough, and a refuge, and a place to dwell in, and no man was there before us, and few were like to find it, and we were but a few. So we dwelt here in this Vale for as wild as it is, the place where the sun shineth never in the winter, and scant is the summer sunshine therein. Here we raised a Doom-ring and builded us a Hall, wherein thou now sittest beside me, O friend, and we dwelt here many seasons.

‘We had a few sheep in the wilderness, and a few neat fed down the grass of the Vale; and we found gems and copper in the rocks about us wherewith at whiles to chaffer with the

aliens, and fish we drew from our river the Shivering Flood. Also it is not to be hidden that in those days we did not spare to lift the goods of men; yea, whiles would our warriors fare down unto the edges of the Plain and lie in wait there till the time served, and then drive the spoil from under the very walls of the Cities. Our men were not little-hearted, nor did our women lament the death of warriors over-much, for they were there to bear more warriors to the Folk.

‘But the seasons passed, and the Folk multiplied in Shadowy Vale, and livelihood seemed like to fail them, and needs must they seek wider lands. So by ways which thou wilt one day wot of, we came into a valley that lieth north-west of Shadowy Vale: a land like thine of Burgdale, or better; wide it was, plenteous of grass and trees, well watered, full of all things that man can desire.

‘Were there men before us in this Dale? sayest thou. Yea, but not very many, and they feeble in battle, weak of heart, though strong of body. These, when they saw the Sons of the Wolf with weapons in their hands, felt themselves puny before us, and their hearts failed them; and they came to us with gifts, and offered to share the Dale between them and us, for they said there was enough for both folks. So we took their offer and became their friends; and some of our Houses wedded wives of the strangers, and gave them their women to wife. Therein they did amiss; for the blended Folk as the generations passed became softer than our blood, and many were untrusty and greedy and tyrannous, and the days of the whoredom fell upon us, and when we deemed ourselves the mightiest then were we the nearest to our fall. But the House whereof I am would never wed with these Westlanders, and other Houses there were who had affinity with us who chiefly wedded with us of the Wolf, and their fathers had come with ours into that fruitful Dale; and these were called the Red Hand, and the Silver Arm, and the Golden Bushel, and the Ragged Sword. Thou hast heard those names once before, friend?’

‘Yea,’ he said, and as he spoke the picture of that other day came back to him, and he called to mind all that he had said, and his happiness of that hour seemed the more and the sweeter for that memory.

She went on: ‘Fair and goodly is that Dale as mine own eyes have seen, and plentiful of all things, and up in its mountains to the east are caves and pits whence silver is digged abundantly; therefore is the Dale called Silver-dale. Hast thou heard thereof, my friend?’

‘Nay,’ said Face-of-god, ‘though I have marvelled whence ye gat such foison of silver.’

He looked on her and marvelled, for now she seemed as if it were another woman: her eyes were gleaming bright, her lips were parted; there was a bright red flush on the pommels of her two cheeks as she spake again and said:

‘Happy lived the Folk in Silver-dale for many and many winters and summers: the seasons were good and no lack was there: little sickness there was and less war, and all seemed better than well. It is strange that ye Dalesmen have not heard of Silver-dale.’

‘Nay,’ said he, ‘but I have not; of Rose-dale have I heard, as a land very far away: but no further do we know of toward that áirt. Lieth Silver-dale anywhere nigh to Rose-dale?’

She said: ‘It is the next dale to it, yet is it a far journey betwixt the two, for the ice-sea pusheth a horn in betwixt them; and even below the ice the mountain-neck is passable to none save a bold crag-climber, and to him only bearing his life in his hands. But, my friend, I am but lingering over my tale, because it grieveth me sore to have to tell it. Hearken then! In the days when I had seen but ten summers, and my brother was a very young man, but exceeding strong, and as beautiful as thou art now, war fell on us without rumour or warning; for there swarmed into Silver-dale, though not by the ways whereby we had entered it, a host of aliens, short of stature, crooked of limb, foul of aspect, but fierce warriors and armed full well: they were men having no country to go back to, though they had no women or children with them, as we had when we were young in these lands, but used all women whom they took as their beastly lust bade them, making them their thralls if they slew them not. Soon we found that these foemen asked no more of us than all we had, and therewithal our lives to be cast away or used for their service as beasts of burden or pleasure. There then we gathered our fighting-men and withstood them; and if we had been all of the kindreds of the Wolf and the fruit of the wives of warriors, we should have driven back these felons and saved the Dale, though it maybe more than half ruined: but the most part of us were of that mingled blood, or of the generations of the Dalesmen whom we had conquered long ago, and stout as they were of body their hearts failed them, and they gave themselves up to the aliens to be as their oxen and asses.

‘Why make a long tale of it? We who were left, and could brook death but not thralldom, fought it out together, women as well as men, till the sweetness of life and a happy chance for escape bid us flee, vanquished but free men. For at the end of three days’ fight we had been driven up to the easternmost end of the Dale, and up anigh to the jaws of the pass whereby the Folk had first come into Silver-dale, and we had those with us who knew every cranny of that way, while to strangers who knew it not it was utterly impassable; night was coming on also, and even those murder-carles were weary with slaying; and, moreover, on this last day, when they saw that they had won all, they were fighting to keep, and not to slay, and a few stubborn carles and queens, of what use would they be, or where was the gain of risking life to win them?’

‘So they forbore us, and night came on moonless and dark; and it was the early spring season, when the days are not yet long, and so by night and cloud we fled away, and back again to Shadowy Vale.

‘Forsooth, we were but a few; for when we were gotten into this Vale, this strip of grass and water in the wilderness, and had told up our company, we were but two hundred and thirty and five of men and women and children. For there were an hundred and thirty and three grown men of all ages, and of women grown seventy and five, and one score and seven children, whereof I was one; for, as thou mayst deem, it was easier for grown men with weapons in their hands to escape from that slaughter than for women and children.

‘There sat we in yonder Doom-ring and took counsel, and to some it seemed good that we should all dwell together in Shadowy Vale, and beset the skirts of the foemen till the days should better; but others deemed that there was little avail therein; and there was a mighty man of the kindred, Stone-wolf by name, a man of middle-age, and he said, that late in life had he tasted of war, and though the banquet was made bitter with defeat, yet did the meat seem wholesome to him. “Come down with me to the Cities of the Plain,” said he, “all you who are stout warriors; and leave we here the old men and the swains and the women and children. Hateful are the folk there, and full of malice, but soft withal and dastardly. Let us go down thither and make ourselves strong amongst them, and sell our valour for their wealth till we come to rule them, and they make us their kings, and we establish the Folk of the Wolf amongst the aliens; then will we come back hither and bring away that which we have left.”

‘So he spake, and the more part of the warriors yea said his rede, and they went with him to the Westland, and amongst these was my brother Folk-might (for that is his name in the kindred). And I sorrowed at his departure, for he had borne me thither out of the flames and the clash of swords and the press of battle, and to me had he ever been kind and loving, albeit he hath had the Words of hard and froward used on him full oft.

‘So in this Vale abode we that were left, and the seasons passed; some of the elders died, and some of the children also; but more children were born, for amongst us were men and women to whom it was lawful to wed with each other. Even with this scanty remnant was left some of the life of the kindred of old days; and after we had been here but a little while, the young men, yea and the old also, and even some of the women, would steal through passes that we, and we only, knew of, and would fall upon the Aliens in Silver-dale as occasion served, and lift their goods both live and dead; and this became both a craft and a pastime amongst us. Nor may I hide that we sometimes went lifting elsewhere; for in the summer and autumn we would fare west a little and abide in the woods the season through, and hunt the deer thereof, and whiles would we drive the spoil from the scattered folk not far from your Shepherd-Folk; but with the Shepherds themselves and with you Dalesmen we meddled not.

‘Now that little wood-lawn with the toft of an ancient dwelling in it, wherein, saith Bow-may, thou didst once rest, was one of our summer abodes; and later on we built the hall under the pine-wood that thou knowest.

‘Thus then grew up our young men; and our maids were little softer; e’en such as Bow-may is (and kind is she withal), and it seemed in very sooth as if the Spirit of the Wolf was with us, and the roughness of the Waste made us fierce; and law we had not and heeded not, though love was amongst us.’

She stopped awhile and fell a-musing, and her face softened, and she turned to him with that sweet happy look upon it and said:

‘Desolate and dreary is the Dale, thou deemest, friend; and yet for me I love it and its dark-green water, and it is to me as if the Fathers of the kindred visit it and hold converse with us; and there I grew up when I was little, before I knew what a woman was, and strange

communings had I with the wilderness. Friend, when we are wedded, and thou art a great chieftain, as thou wilt be, I shall ask of thee the boon to suffer me to abide here at whiles that I may remember the days when I was little and the love of the kindred waxed in me.'

'This is but a little thing to ask,' said Face-of-god; 'I would thou hadst asked me more.'

'Fear not,' she said, 'I shall ask thee for much and many things; and some of them belike thou shalt deny me.'

He shook his head; but she smiled in his face and said:

'Yea, so it is, friend; but hearken. The seasons passed, and six years wore, and I was grown a tall slim maiden, fleet of foot and able to endure toil enough, though I never bore weapons, nor have done. So on a fair even of midsummer when we were together, the most of us, round about this Hall and the Doom-ring, we saw a tall man in bright war-gear come forth into the Dale by the path that thou camest, and then another and another till there were two score and seven men-at-arms standing on the grass below the scree yonder; by that time had we gotten some weapons in our hands, and we stood together to meet the new-comers, but they drew no sword and notched no shaft, but came towards us laughing and joyous, and lo! it was my brother Folk-might and his men, those that were left of them, come back to us from the Westland.

'Glad indeed was I to behold him; and for him when he had taken me in his arms and looked up and down the Dale, he cried out: 'In many fair places and many rich dwellings have I been; but this is the hour that I have looked for.'

'Now when we asked him concerning Stone-wolf and the others who were missing (for ten tens of stalwarth men had fared to the Westland), he swept out his hand toward the west and said with a solemn face: "There they lie, and grass groweth over their bones, and we who have come aback, and ye who have abided, these are now the children of the Wolf: there are no more now on the earth."

'Let be! It was a fair even and high was the feast in the Hall that night, and sweet was the converse with our folk come back. A glad man was my brother Folk-might when he heard that for years past we had been lifting the gear of men, and chiefly of the Aliens in Silver-dale: and he himself was become learned in war and a deft leader of men.

'So the days passed and the seasons, and we lived on as we might; but with Folk-might's return there began to grow up in all our hearts what had long been flourishing in mine, and that was the hope of one day winning back our own again, and dying amidst the dear groves of Silver-dale. Within these years we had increased somewhat in number; for if we had lost those warriors in the Westland, and some old men who had died in the Dale, yet our children had grown up (I have now seen twenty and one summers) and more were growing up. Moreover, after the first year, from the time when we began to fall upon the Dusky Men of Silver-dale, from time to time they who went on such adventures set free such thralls of our blood as they could fall in with and whom they could trust in, and they dwelt (and yet dwell) with us in the Dale: first and last we have taken in three score and twelve of such men, and a score of women-thralls withal.

'Now during these seasons, and not very long ago, after I was a woman grown, the thought came to me, and to Folk-might also, that there were kindreds of the people dwelling anear us whom we might so deal with that they should become our friends and brothers in arms, and that through them we might win back Silver-dale.

'Of Rose-dale we wotted already that the Folk were nought of our blood, feeble in the field, cowed by the Dusky Men, and at last made thralls to them; so nought was to do there. But Folk-might went to and fro to gather tidings: at whiles I with him, at whiles one or more of Wood-father's children, who with their father and mother and Bow-may have abided in the Vale ever since the Great Undoing.

'Soon he fell in with thy Folk, and first of all with the Woodlanders, and that was a joy to him; for wot ye what? He got to know that these men were the children of those of our Folk who had sundered from us in the mountain passes time long and long ago; and he loved them, for he saw that they were hardy and trusty, and warriors at heart.

'Then he went amongst the Shepherd-Folk, and he deemed them good men easily stirred, and deemed that they might soon be won to friendship; and he knew that they were mostly come from the Houses of the Woodlanders, so that they also were of the kindred.

'And last he came into Burgdale, and found there a merry and happy Folk, little wont to war,

but stout-hearted, and nowise puny either of body or soul; he went there often and learned much about them, and deemed that they would not be hard to win to fellowship. And he found that the House of the Face was the chiefest house there; and that the Alderman and his sons were well beloved of all the folk, and that they were the men to be won first, since through them should all others be won. I also went to Burgstead with him twice, as I told thee erst; and I saw thee, and I deemed that thou wouldest lightly become our friend; and it came into my mind that I myself might wed thee, and that the House of the Face thereby might have affinity thenceforth with the Children of the Wolf.

He said: 'Why didst thou deem thus of me, O friend?'

She laughed and said: 'Dost thou long to hear me say the words when thou knowest my thought well? So be it. I saw thee both young and fair; and I knew thee to be the son of a noble, worthy, guileless man and of a beauteous woman of great wits and good rede. And I found thee to be kind and open-handed and simple like thy father, and like thy mother wiser than thou thyself knew of thyself; and that thou wert desirous of deeds and fain of women.'

She was silent for a while, and he also: then he said: 'Didst thou draw me to the woods and to thee?'

She reddened and said: 'I am no spell-wife: but true it is that Wood-mother made a waxen image of thee, and thrust through the heart thereof the pin of my girdle-buckle, and stroked it every morning with an oak-bough over which she had sung spells. But dost thou not remember, Gold-mane, how that one day last Hay-month, as ye were resting in the meadows in the cool of the evening, there came to you a minstrel that played to you on the fiddle, and therewith sang a song that melted all your hearts, and that this song told of the Wild-wood, and what was therein of desire and peril and beguiling and death, and love unto Death itself? Dost thou remember, friend?'

'Yea,' he said, 'and how when the minstrel was done Stone-face fell to telling us more tales yet of the woodland, and the minstrel sang again and yet again, till his tales had entered into my very heart.'

'Yea,' she said, 'and that minstrel was Wood-wont; and I sent him to sing to thee and thine, deeming that if thou didst hearken, thou would'st seek the woodland and happen upon us.'

He laughed and said: 'Thou didst not doubt but that if we met, thou mightest do with me as thou wouldest?'

'So it is,' she said, 'that I doubted it little.'

'Therein wert thou wise,' said Face-of-god; 'but now that we are talking without guile to each other, mightest thou tell me wherefore it was that Folk-might made that onslaught upon me? For certain it is that he was minded to slay me.'

She said: 'It was sooth what I told thee, that whiles he groweth so battle-eager that whatso edge-tool he beareth must needs come out of the scabbard; but there was more in it than that, which I could not tell thee erst. Two days before thy coming he had been down to Burgstead in the guise of an old carle such as thou sawest him with me in the market-place. There was he guested in your Hall, and once more saw thee and the Bride together; and he saw the eyes of love wherewith she looked on thee (for so much he told me), and deemed that thou didst take her love but lightly. And he himself looked on her with such love (and this he told me not) that he deemed nought good enough for her, and would have had thee give thyself up wholly to her; for my brother is a generous man, my friend. So when I told him on the morn of that day whereon we met that we looked to see thee that eve (for indeed I am somewhat foreseeing), he said: "Look thou, Sun-beam, if he cometh, it is not unlike that I shall drive a spear through him." "Wherefore?" said I; "can he serve our turn when he is dead?" Said he: "I care little. Mine own turn will I serve. Thou sayest *Wherefore*? I tell thee this stripling beguileth to her torment the fairest woman that is in the world—such an one as is meet to be the mother of chieftains, and to stand by warriors in their day of peril. I have seen her; and thus have I seen her." Then said I: "Greatly forsooth shalt thou pleasure her by slaying him!" And he answered: "I shall pleasure myself. And one day she shall thank me, when she taketh my hand in hers and we go together to the Bride-bed." Therewith came over me a clear foresight of the hours to come, and I said to him: "Yea, Folk-might, cast the spear and draw the sword; but him thou shalt not slay: and thou shalt one day see him standing with us before the shafts of the Dusky Men." So I spake; but he looked fiercely at me, and departed and shunned me all that day, and by good hap I was hard at hand when thou drewest nigh our abode. Nay, Gold-mane, what would'st thou with thy sword? Why art thou so red

and wrathful? Would'st thou fight with my brother because he loveth thy friend, thine old playmate, thy kinswoman, and thinketh pity of her sorrow?'

He said, with knit brow and gleaming eyes: 'Would the man take her away from me perforce?'

'My friend,' she said, 'thou art not yet so wise as not to be a fool at whiles. Is it not so that she herself hath taken herself from thee, since she hath come to know that thou hast given thyself to another? Hath she noted nought of thee this winter and spring? Is she well pleased with the ways of thee?'

He said: 'Thou hast spoken simply with me, and I will do no less with thee. It was but four days ago that she did me to wit that she knew of me how I sought my love on the Mountain; and she put me to sore shame, and afterwards I wept for her sorrow.'

Therewith he told her all that the Bride had said to him, as he well might, for he had forgotten no word of it.

Then said the Friend: 'She shall have the token that she craveth, and it is I that shall give it to her.'

Therewith she took from her finger a ring wherein was set a very fair changeful mountain-stone, and gave it to him, and said:

'Thou shalt give her this and tell her whence thou hadst it; and tell her that I bid her remember that To-morrow is a new day.'

CHAPTER XX. THOSE TWO TOGETHER HOLD THE RING OF THE EARTH-GOD.

And now they fell silent both of them, and sat hearkening the sounds of the Dale, from the whistle of the plover down by the water-side to the far-off voices of the children and maidens about the kine in the lower meadows. At last Gold-mane took up the word and said:

'Sweet friend, tell me the uttermost of what thou would'st have of me. Is it not that I should stand by thee and thine in the Folk-mote of the Dalesmen, and speak for you when ye pray us for help against your foemen; and then again that I do my best when ye and we are arrayed for battle against the Dusky Men? This is easy to do, and great is the reward thou offerest me.'

'I look for this service of thee,' she said, 'and none other.'

'And when I go down to the battle,' said he, 'shalt thou be sorry for our sundering?'

She said: 'There shall be no sundering; I shall wend with thee.'

Said he: 'And if I were slain in the battle, would'st thou lament me?'

'Thou shalt not be slain,' she said.

Again was there silence betwixt them, till at last he said:

'This then is why thou didst draw me to thee in the Wild-wood?'

'Yea,' said she.

Again for a while no word was spoken, and Face-of-god looked on her till she cast her eyes down before him.

Then at last he spake, and the colour came and went in his face as he said: 'Tell me thy name what it is.'

She said: 'I am called the Sun-beam.'

Then he said, and his voice trembled therewith: 'O Sun-beam, I have been seeking pleasant and cunning words, and can find none such. But tell me this if thou wilt: dost thou desire me as I desire thee? or is it that thou wilt suffer me to wed thee and bed thee at last as mere payment for the help that I shall give to thee and thine? Nay, doubt it not that I will take the payment, if this is what thou wilt give me and nought else. Yet tell me.'

Her face grew troubled, and she said:

'Gold-mane, maybe that thou hast now asked me one question too many; for this is no fair game to be played between us. For thee, as I deem, there are this day but two people in the world, and that is thou and I, and the earth is for us two alone. But, my friend, though I have seen but twenty and one summers, it is nowise so with me, and to me there are many in the world; and chiefly the Folk of the Wolf, amidst whose very heart I have grown up. Moreover, I can think of her whom I have supplanted, the Bride to wit; and I know her, and how bitter and empty her days shall be for a while, and how vain all our reds for her shall seem to her. Yea,

I know her sorrow, and see it and grieve for it: so canst not thou, unless thou verily see her before thee, her face unhappy, and her voice changed and hard. Well, I will tell thee what thou askest. When I drew thee to me on the Mountain I thought but of the friendship and brotherhood to be knitted up between our two Folks, nor did I anywise desire thy love of a young man. But when I saw thee on the heath and in the Hall that day, it pleased me to think that a man so fair and chieftain-like should one day lie by my side; and again when I saw that the love of me had taken hold of thee, I would not have thee grieved because of me, but would have thee happy. And now what shall I say?—I know not; I cannot tell. Yet am I the Friend, as erst I called myself.

‘And, Gold-mane, I have seen hitherto but the outward show and image of thee, and though that be goodly, how would it be if thou didst shame me with little-heartedness and evil deeds? Let me see thee in the Folk-mote and the battle, and then may I answer thee.’

Then she held her peace, and he answered nothing; and she turned her face from him and said:

‘Out on it! have I beguiled myself as well as thee? These are but empty words I have been saying. If thou wilt drag the truth out of me, this is the very truth: that to-day is happy to me as it is to thee, and that I have longed sore for its coming. O Gold-mane, O speech-friend, if thou wert to pray me or command me that I lie in thine arms to-night, I should know not how to gainsay thee. Yet I beseech thee to forbear, lest thy death and mine come of it. And why should we die, O friend, when we are so young, and the world lies so fair before us, and the happy days are at hand when the Children of the Wolf and the kindreds of the Dale shall deliver the Folk, and all days shall be good and all years?’

They had both risen up as she spake, and now he put forth his hands to her and took her in his arms, wondering the while, as he drew her to him, how much slenderer and smaller and weaker she seemed in his embrace than he had thought of her; and when their lips met, he felt that she kissed him as he her. Then he held her by the shoulders at arms’ length from him, and beheld her face how her eyes were closed and her lips quivering. But before him, in a moment of time, passed a picture of the life to be in the fair Dale, and all she would give him there, and the days good and lovely from morn to eve and eve to morn; and though in that moment it was hard for him to speak, at last he spoke in a voice hoarse at first, and said:

‘Thou sayest sooth, O friend; we will not die, but live; I will not drag our deaths upon us both, nor put a sword in the hands of Folk-might, who loves me not.’

Then he kissed her on the brow and said: ‘Now shalt thou take me by the hand and lead me forth from the Hall. For the day is waxing old, and here meseemeth in this dim hall there are words crossing in the air about us—words spoken in days long ago, and tales of old time, that keep egging me on to do my will and die, because that is all that the world hath for a valiant man; and to such words I would not hearken, for in this hour I have no will to die, nor can I think of death.’

She took his hand and led him forth without more words, and they went hand in hand and paced slowly round the Doom-ring, the light air breathing upon them till their faces were as calm and quiet as their wont was, and hers especially as bright and happy as when he had first seen her that day.

The sun was sinking now, and only sent one golden ray into the valley through a cleft in the western rock-wall, but the sky overhead was bright and clear; from the meadows came the sound of the lowing of kine and the voices of children a-sporting, and it seemed to Gold-mane that they were drawing nigher, both the children and the kine, and somewhat he begrudged it that he should not be alone with the Friend.

Now when they had made half the circuit of the Doom-ring, the Sun-beam stopped him, and then led him through the Ring of Stones, and brought him up to the altar which was amidst of it; and the altar was a great black stone hewn smooth and clean, and with the image of the Wolf carven on the front thereof; and on its face lay the gold ring which the priest or captain of the Folk bore on his arm between the God and the people at all folk-motes.

So she said: ‘This is the altar of the God of Earth, and often hath it been reddened by mighty men; and thereon lieth the Ring of the Sons of the Wolf; and now it were well that we swore troth on that ring before my brother cometh; for now will he soon be here.’

Then Gold-mane took the Ring and thrust his right hand through it, and took her right hand in his; so that the Ring lay on both their hands, and therewith he spake aloud:

‘I am Face-of-god of the House of the Face, and I do thee to wit, O God of the Earth, that I

pledge my troth to this woman, the Sun-beam of the Kindred of the Wolf, to beget my offspring on her, and to live with her, and to die with her: so help me, thou God of the Earth, and the Warrior and the God of the Face!

Then spake the Sun-beam: 'I, the Sun-beam of the Children of the Wolf, pledge my troth to Face-of-god to lie in his bed and to bear his children and none other's, and to be his speech-friend till I die: so help me the Wolf and the Warrior and the God of the Earth!'

Then they laid the Ring on the altar again, and they kissed each other long and sweetly, and then turned away from the altar and departed from the Doom-ring, going hand in hand together down the meadow, and as they went, the noise of the kine and the children grew nearer and nearer, and presently came the whole company of them round a ness of the rock-wall; there were some thirty little lads and lasses driving on the milch-kine, with half a score of older maids and grown women, one of whom was Bow-may, who was lightly and scantily clad, as one who heeds not the weather, or deems all months midsummer.

The children came running up merrily when they saw the Sun-beam, but stopped short shyly when they noted the tall fair stranger with her. They were all strong and sturdy children, and some very fair, but brown with the weather, if not with the sun. Bow-may came up to Gold-mane and took his hand and greeted him kindly and said:

'So here thou art at last in Shadowy Vale; and I hope that thou art content therewith, and as happy as I would wish thee to be. Well, this is the first time; and when thou comest the second time it may well be that the world shall be growing better.'

She held the distaff which she bore in her hand (for she had been spinning) as if it were a spear; her limbs were goodly and shapely, and she trod the thick grass of the Vale with a kind of wary firmness, as though foemen might be lurking nearby. The Sun-beam smiled upon her kindly and said:

'That shall not fail to be, Bow-may: ye have won a new friend to-day. But tell me, when dost thou look to see the men here, for I was down by the water when they went away yesterday?'

'They shall come into the Dale a little after sunset,' said Bow-may.

'Shall I abide them, my friend?' said Gold-mane, turning to the Sun-beam.

'Yea,' she said; 'for what else art thou come hither? or art thou so pressed to depart from us? Last time we met thou wert not so hasty to sunder.'

They smiled on each other; and Bow-may looked on them and laughed outright; then a flush showed in her cheeks through the tan of them, and she turned toward the children and the other women who were busied about the milking of the kine.

But those two sat down together on a bank amidst the plain meadow, facing the river and the eastern rock-wall, and the Sun-beam said:

'I am fain to speak to thee and to see thine eyes watching me while I speak; and now, my friend, I will tell thee something unasked which has to do with what e'en now thou didst ask me; for I would have thee trust me wholly, and know me for what I am. Time was I schemed and planned for this day of betrothal; but now I tell thee it has become no longer needful for bringing to pass our fellowship in arms with thy people. Yea yesterday, ere he went on a hunt, whereof he shall tell thee, Folk-might was against it, in words at least; and yet as one who would have it done if he might have no part in it. So, in good sooth, this hand that lieth in thine is the hand of a wilful woman, who desireth a man, and would keep him for her speech-friend. Now art thou fond and happy; yet bear in mind that there are deeds to be done, and the troth we have just plighted must be paid for. So hearken, I bid thee. Dost thou care to know why the wheedling of thee is no longer needful to us?'

He said: 'A little while ago I should have said, Yea, If thy lips say the words. But now, O friend, it seemeth as if thine heart were already become a part of mine, and I feel as if the chieftain were growing up in me and the longing for deeds: so I say, Tell me, for I were fain to hear what toucheth the welfare of thy Folk and their fellowship with my Folk; for on that also have I set my heart?'

She said gravely and with solemn eyes:

'What thou sayest is good: full glad am I that I have not plighted my troth to a mere goodly lad, but rather to a chieftain and a warrior. Now then hearken! Since I saw thee first in the autumn this hath happened, that the Dusky Men, increasing both in numbers and insolence, have it in their hearts to win more than Silver-dale, and it is years since they have fallen upon Rose-dale and conquered it, rather by murder than by battle, and made all men thralls there,

for feeble were the Folk thereof; and doubt it not but that they will look into Burgdale before long. They are already abroad in the woods, and were it not for the fear of the Wolf they would be thicker therein, and faring wider; for we have slain many of them, coming upon them unawares; and they know not where we dwell, nor who we be: so they fear to spread about over-much and pry into unknown places lest the Wolf howl on them. Yet beware! for they will gather in numbers that we may not meet, and then will they swarm into the Dale; and if ye would live your happy life that ye love so well, ye must now fight for it; and in that battle must ye needs join yourselves to us, that we may help each other. Herein have ye nought to choose, for now with you it is no longer a thing to talk of whether ye will help certain strangers and guests and thereby win some gain to yourselves, but whether ye have the hearts to fight for yourselves, and the wits to be the fellows of tall men and stout warriors who have pledged their lives to win or die for it.'

She was silent a little and then turned and looked fondly on Face-of-god and said:

'Therefore, Gold-mane, we need thee no longer; for thou must needs fight in our battle. I have no longer aught to do to wheedle thee to love me. Yet if thou wilt love me, then am I a glad woman.'

He said: 'Thou wottest well that thou hast all my love, neither will I fail thee in the battle. I am not little-hearted, though I would have given myself to thee for no reward.'

'It is well,' said the Sun-beam; 'nought is undone by that which I have done. Moreover, it is good that we have plighted troth to-day. For Folk-might will presently hear thereof, and he must needs abide the thing which is done. Harken! he cometh.'

For as she spoke there came a glad cry from the women and children, and those two stood up and turned toward the west and beheld the warriors of the Wolf coming down into the Dale by the way that Gold-mane had come.

'Come,' said the Sun-beam, 'here are your brethren in arms, let us go greet them; they will rejoice in thee.'

So they went thither, and there stood eighty and seven men on the grass below the scree and Folk-might their captain; and besides some valiant women, and a few carles who were on watch on the waste, and a half score who had been left in the Dale, these were all the warriors of the Wolf. They were clad in no holiday raiment, not even Folk-might, but were in sheep-brown gear of the coarsest, like to husbandmen late come from the plough, but armed well and goodly.

But when the twain drew near, the men clashed their spears on their shields, and cried out for joy of them, for they all knew what Face-of-god's presence there betokened of fellowship with the kindreds; but Folk-might came forward and took Face-of-god's hand and greeted him and said:

'Hail, son of the Alderman! Here hast thou come into the ancient abode of chieftains and warriors, and belike deeds await thee also.'

Yet his brow was knitted as he said these words, and he spake slowly, as one that constraineth himself; but presently his face cleared somewhat and he said:

'Dalesman, it behoveth thy people to bestir them if ye would live and see good days. Hath my sister told thee what is toward? Or what sayest thou?'

'Hail to thee, son of the Wolf!' said Face-of-god. 'Thy sister hath told me all; and even if these Dusky Felons were not our foe-men also, yet could I have my way, we should have given thee all help, and should have brought back peace and good days to thy folk.'

Then Folk-might flushed red and spake, as he cast out his hand towards the warriors and up and down toward the Dale:

'These be my folk, and these only: and as to peace, only those of us know of it who are old men. Yet is it well; and if we and ye together be strong enough to bring back good days to the feeble men whom the Dusky Ones torment in Silver-dale it shall be better yet.'

Then he turned about to his sister, and looked keenly into her eyes till she reddened, and took her hand and looked at the wrist and said:

'O sister, see I not the mark on thy wrist of the Ring of the God of the Earth? Have not oaths been sworn since yesterday?'

'True it is,' she said, 'that this man and I have plighted troth together at the altar of the Doom-ring.'

Said Folk-might: 'Thou wilt have thy will, and I may not amend it.' Therewith he turned

about to Face-of-god and said:

‘Thou must look to it to keep this oath, whatever other one thou hast failed in.’

Said Face-of-god somewhat wrathfully: ‘I shall keep it, whether thou biddest me to keep it or break it.’

‘That is well,’ said Folk-might, ‘and then for all that hath gone before thou mayest in a manner pay, if thou art dauntless before the foe.’

‘I look to be no blencher in the battle,’ said Face-of-god; ‘that is not the fashion of our kindred, whosoever may be before us. Yea, and even were it thy blade, O mighty warrior of the Wolf, I would do my best to meet it in manly fashion.’

As he spake he half drew forth Dale-warden from his sheath, looking steadily into the eyes of Folk-might; and the Sun-beam looked upon him happily. But Folk-might laughed and said:

‘Thy sword is good, and I deem that thine heart will not fail thee; but it is by my side and not in face of me that thou shalt redden the good blade: I see not the day when we twain shall hew at each other.’

Then in a while he spake again:

‘Thou must pardon us if our words are rough; for we have stood in rough places, where we had to speak both short and loud, whereas there was much to do. But now will we twain talk of matters that concern chieftains who are going on a hard adventure. And ye women, do ye dight the Hall for the evening feast, which shall be the feast of the troth-plight for you twain. This indeed we owe thee, O guest; for little shall be thine heritage which thou shalt have with my sister, over and above that thy sword winneth for thee.’

But the Sun-beam said: ‘Hast thou any to-night?’

‘Yea,’ he said; ‘Spear-god, how many was it?’

There came forward a tall man bearing an axe in his right hand, and carrying over his shoulder by his left hand a bundle of silver arm-rings just such as Gold-mane had seen on the felons who were slain by Wood-grey’s house. The carle cast them on the ground and then knelt down and fell to telling them over; and then looked up and said: ‘Twelve yesterday in the wood where the battle was going on; and this morning seven by the tarn in the pine-wood and six near this eastern edge of the wood: one score and five all told. But, Folk-might, they are coming nigh to Shadowy Vale.’

‘Sooth is that,’ said Folk-might; ‘but it shall be looked to. Come now apart with me, Face-of-god.’

So the others went their ways toward the Hall, while Folk-might led the Burgdaler to a sheltered nook under the sheer rocks, and there they sat down to talk, and Folk-might asked Gold-mane closely of the muster of the Dalesmen and the Shepherds and the Woodland Caries, and he was well pleased when Face-of-god told him of how many could march to a stricken field, and of their archery, and of their weapons and their goodness.

All this took some time in the telling, and now night was coming on apace, and Folk-might said:

‘Now will it be time to go to the Hall; but keep in thy mind that these Dusky Men will overrun you unless ye deal with them betimes. These are of the kind that ye must cast fear into their hearts by falling on them; for if ye abide till they fall upon you, they are like the winter wolves that swarm on and on, how many soever ye slay. And this above all things shall help you, that we shall bring you whereas ye shall fall on them unawares and destroy them as boys do with a wasp’s nest. Yet shall many a mother’s son bite the dust.

‘Is it not so that in four weeks’ time is your spring-feast and market at Burgstead, and thereafter the great Folk-mote?’

‘So it is,’ said Gold-mane.

‘Thither shall I come then,’ said Folk-might, ‘and give myself out for the slayer of Rusty and the ransacker of Harts-bane and Penny-thumb; and therefor shall I offer good blood-wite and theft-wite; and thy father shall take that; for he is a just man. Then shall I tell my tale. Yet it may be thou shalt see us before if battle betide. And now fair befall this new year; for soon shall the scabbards be empty and the white swords be dancing in the air, and spears and axes shall be the growth of this spring-tide.’

And he leaped up from his seat and walked to and fro before Gold-mane, and now was it grown quite dark. Then Folk-might turned to Face-of-god and said:

‘Come, guest, the windows of the Hall are yellow; let us to the feast. To-morrow shalt thou get thee to the beginning of this work. I hope of thee that thou art a good sword; else have I done a folly and my sister a worse one. But now forget that, and feast.’

Gold-mane arose, not very well at ease, for the man seemed overbearing; yet how might he fall upon the Sun-beam’s kindred, and the captain of these new brethren in arms? So he spake not. But Folk-might said to him:

‘Yet I would not have thee forget that I was wroth with thee when I saw thee to-day; and had it not been for the coming battle I had drawn sword upon thee.’

Then Face-of-god’s wrath was stirred, and he said:

‘There is yet time for that! but why art thou wroth with me? And I shall tell thee that there is little manliness in thy chiding. For how may I fight with thee, thou the brother of my plighted speech-friend and my captain in this battle?’

‘Therein thou sayest sooth,’ said Folk-might; ‘but hard it was to see you two standing together; and thou canst not give the Bride to me as I give my sister to thee. For I have seen her, and I have seen her looking at thee; and I know that she will not have it so.’

Then they went on together toward the Hall, and Face-of-god was silent and somewhat troubled; and as they drew near to the Hall, Folk-might spake again:

‘Yet time may amend it; and if not, there is the battle, and maybe the end. Now be we merry!’

So they went into the Hall together, and there was the Sun-beam gloriously arrayed, as erst in the woodland bower, and Face-of-god sat on the daïs beside her, and the uttermost sweetness of desire entered into his soul as he noted her eyes and her mouth, that were grown so kind to him, and her hand that strayed toward his.

The Hall was full of folk, and all those warriors were there with Wood-father and his sons, and Wood-mother, and Bow-may and many other women; and Gold-mane looked down the Hall and deemed that he had never seen such stalwarth bodies of men, or so bold and meet for battle: as for the women he had seen fairer in Burgdale, but these were fair of their own fashion, shapely and well-knit, and strong-armed and large-limbed, yet sweet-voiced and gentle withal. Nay, the very lads of fifteen winters or so, whereof a few were there, seemed bold and bright-eyed and keen of wit, and it seemed like that if the warriors fared afield these would be with them.

So wore the feast; and Folk-might as aforetime amongst the healths called on men to drink to the Jaws of the Wolf, and the Red Hand, and the Silver Arm, and the Golden Bushel, and the Ragged Sword. But now had Face-of-god no need to ask what these meant, since he knew that they were the names of the kindreds of the Wolf. They drank also to the troth-plight and to those twain, and shouted aloud over the health and clashed their weapons: and Gold-mane wondered what echo of that shout would reach to Burgstead.

Then sang men songs of old time, and amongst them Wood-wont stood with his fiddle amidst the Hall and Bow-may beside him, and they sang in turn to it sweetly and clearly; and this is some of what they sang:

She singeth.

Wild is the waste and long leagues over;
Whither then wend ye spear and sword,
Where nought shall see your helms but the plover,
Far and far from the dear Dale’s sward?

He singeth.

Many a league shall we wend together
With helm and spear and bended bow.
Hark! how the wind blows up for weather:
Dark shall the night be whither we go.
Dark shall the night be round the byre,
And dark as we drive the brindled kine;
Dark and dark round the beacon-fire,
Dark down in the pass round our wavering line.
Turn on thy path, O fair-foot maiden,
And come our ways by the pathless road;
Look how the clouds hang low and laden
Over the walls of the old abode!

She singeth.

Bare are my feet for the rough waste's wending,
 Wild is the wind, and my kirtle's thin;
 Faint shall I be ere the long way's ending
 Drops down to the Dale and the grief therein.

He singeth.

Do on the brogues of the wild-wood rover,
 Do on the byrnies' ring-close mail;
 Take thou the staff that the barbs hang over,
 O'er the wind and the waste and the way to prevail.
 Come, for how from thee shall I sunder?
 Come, that a tale may arise in the land;
 Come, that the night may be held for a wonder,
 When the Wolf was led by a maiden's hand!

She singeth.

Now will I fare as ye are faring,
 And wend no way but the way ye wend;
 And bear but the burdens ye are bearing,
 And end the day as ye shall end.
 And many an eve when the clouds are drifting
 Down through the Dale till they dim the roof,
 Shall they tell in the Hall of the Maiden's Lifting,
 And how we drave the spoil aloof.

They sing together.

Over the moss through the wind and the weather,
 Through the morn and the eve and the death of the day,
 Wend we man and maid together,
 For out of the waste is born the fray.

Then the Sun-beam spake to Gold-mane softly, and told him how this song was made by a minstrel concerning a foray in the early days of their first abode in Shadowy Vale, and how in good sooth a maiden led the fray and was the captain of the warriors:

'Erst,' she said, 'this was counted as a wonder; but now we are so few that it is no wonder though the women will do whatsoever they may.'

So they talked, and Gold-mane was very happy; but ere the good-night cup was drunk, Folk-might spake to Face-of-god and said:

'It were well that ye rose betimes in the morning: but thou shalt not go back by the way thou camest. Wood-wise and another shall go with thee, and show thee a way across the necks and the heaths, which is rough enough as far as toil goes, but where thy life shall be safer; and thereby shalt thou hit the ghyll of the Weltering Water, and so come down safely into Burgdale. Now that we are friends and fellows, it is no hurt for thee to know the shortest way to Shadowy Vale. What thou shalt tell concerning us in Burgdale I leave the tale thereof to thee; yet belike thou wilt not tell everything till I come to Burgstead at the spring market-tide. Now must I presently to bed; for before daylight to-morrow must I be following the hunt along with two score good men of ours.'

'What beast is afield then?' said Gold-mane.

Said Folk-might: 'The beasts that beset our lives, the Dusky Men. In these days we have learned how to find companies of them; and forsooth every week they draw nigher to this Dale; and some day they should happen upon us if we were not to look to it, and then would there be a murder great and grim; therefore we scour the heaths round about, and the skirts of the woodland, and we fall upon these felons in divers guises, so that they may not know us for the same men; whiles are we clad in homespun, as to-day, and seem like to field-working carles; whiles in scarlet and gold, like knights of the Westland; whiles in wolf-skins; whiles in white glittering gear, like the Wights of the Waste: and in all guises these felons, for all their fierce hearts, fear us, and flee from us, and we follow and slay them, and so minish their numbers somewhat against the great day of battle.'

'Tell me,' said Gold-mane; 'when we fall upon Silver-dale shall their thralls, the old Dale-dwellers, fight for them or for us?'

Said Folk-might: 'The Dusky Men will not dare to put weapons into the hands of their thralls. Nay, the thralls shall help us; for though they have but small stomach for the fight, yet joyfully when the fight is over shall they cut their masters' throats.'

'How is it with these thralls?' said Gold-mane. 'I have never seen a thrall.'

‘But I,’ said Folk-might, ‘have seen a many down in the Cities. And there were thralls who were the tyrants of thralls, and held the whip over them; and of the others there were some who were not very hardly entreated. But with these it is otherwise, and they all bear grievous pains daily; for the Dusky Men are as hogs in a garden of lilies. Whatsoever is fair there have they defiled and deflowered, and they wallow in our fair halls as swine strayed from the dunghill. No delight in life, no sweet days do they have for themselves, and they begrudge the delight of others therein. Therefore their thralls know no rest or solace; their reward of toil is many stripes, and the healing of their stripes grievous toil. To many have they appointed to dig and mine in the silver-yielding cliffs, and of all the tasks is that the sorest, and there do stripes abound the most. Such thralls art thou happy not to behold till thou hast set them free; as we shall do.’

‘Tell me again,’ said Face-of-god; ‘Is there no mixed folk between these Dusky Men and the Dalesmen, since they have no women of their own, but lie with the women of the Dale? Moreover, do not the poor folk of the Dale beget and bear children, so that there are thralls born of thralls?’

‘Wisely thou askest this,’ said Folk-might, ‘but thereof shall I tell thee, that when a Dusky Carle mingles with a woman of the Dale, the child which she beareth shall oftenest favour his race and not hers; or else shall it be witless, a fool natural. But as for the children of these poor thralls; yea, the masters cause them to breed if so their masterships will, and when the children are born, they keep them or slay them as they will, as they would with whelps or calves. To be short, year by year these vile wretches grow fiercer and more beastly, and their thralls more hapless and down-trodden; and now at last is come the time either to do or to die, as ye men of Burgdale shall speedily find out. But now must I go sleep if I am to be where I look to be at sunrise to-morrow.’

Therewith he called for the sleeping-cup, and it was drunk, and all men fared to bed. But the Sun-beam took Gold-mane’s hand ere they parted, and said:

‘I shall arise betimes on the morrow; so I say not farewell to-night; yea, and after to-morrow it shall not be long ere we meet again.’

So Gold-mane lay down in that ancient hall, and it seemed to him ere he slept as if his own kindred were slipping away from him and he were becoming a child of the Wolf. ‘And yet,’ said he to himself, ‘I am become a man; for my Friend, now she no longer telleth me to do or forbear, and I tremble. Nay, rather she is fain to take the word from me; and this great warrior and ripe man, he talketh with me as if I were a chieftain meet for converse with chieftains. Even so it is and shall be.’

And soon thereafter he fell asleep in the Hall in Shadowy Vale.

CHAPTER XXI. FACE-OF-GOD LOOKETH ON THE DUSKY MEN.

When he awoke again he saw a man standing over him, and knew him for Wood-wise: he was clad in his war-gear, and had his quiver at his back and his bow in his hand, for Wood-father’s children were all good bowmen, though not so sure as Bow-may. He spake to Face-of-god:

‘Dawn is in the sky, Dalesman; there is yet time for thee to wash the night off of thee in our bath of the Shivering Flood and to put thy mouth to the milk-bowl; but time for nought else: for I and Bow-may are appointed thy fellows for the road, and it were well that we were back home speedily.’

So Face-of-god leapt up and went forth from the Hall, and Wood-wise led to where was a pool in the river with steps cut down to it in the rocky bank.

‘This,’ said Wood-wise, ‘is the Carle’s Bath; but the Queen’s is lower down, where the water is wider and shallower below the little mid-dale force.’

So Gold-mane stripped off his raiment and leapt into the ice-cold pool; and they had brought his weapons and war-gear with them; so when he came out he clad and armed himself for the road, and then turned with Wood-wise toward the outgate of the Dale; and soon they saw two men coming from lower down the water in such wise that they would presently cross their path, and as yet it was little more than twilight, so that they saw not at first who they were, but as they drew nearer they knew them for the Sun-beam and Bow-may. The Sun-beam was clad but in her white linen smock and blue gown as he had first seen her, her hair was wet and dripping with the river, her face fresh and rosy: she carried in her two hands a great bowl of milk, and stepped delicately, lest she should spill it. But Bow-may was clad in her war-gear with helm and byrny, and a quiver at her back, and a bended bow in her hand. So they greeted

each other kindly, and the Sun-beam gave the bowl to Face-of-god and said:

‘Drink, guest, for thou hast a long and thirsty road before thee.’

So Face-of-god drank, and gave her the bowl back again, and she smiled on him and drank, and the others after her till the bowl was empty: then Bow-may put her hand on Wood-wise’s shoulder, and they led on toward the outgate, while those twain followed them hand in hand. But the Sun-beam said:

‘This then is the new day I spoke of, and lo! it bringeth our sundering with it; yet shall it be no longer than a day when all is said, and new days shall follow after. And now, my friend, I shall see thee no later than the April market; for doubt not that I shall go thither with Folk-might, whether he will or not. Also as I led thee out of the house when we last met, so shall I lead thee out of the Dale to-day, and I will go with thee a little way on the waste; and therefore am I shod this morning, as thou seest, for the ways on the waste are rough. And now I bid thee have courage while my hand holdeth thine. For afterwards I need not bid thee anything; for thou wilt have enough to do when thou comest to thy Folk, and must needs think more of warriors than than of maidens.’

He looked at her and longed for her, but said soberly: ‘Thou art kind, O friend, and thinkest kindly of me ever. But methinks it were not well done for thee to wend with me over a deal of the waste, and come back by thyself alone, when ye have so many foemen nearby.’

‘Nay,’ she said, ‘they be nought so near as that yet, and I wot that Folk-might hath gone forth toward the north-west, where he looketh to fall in with a company of the foemen. His battle shall be a guard unto us.’

‘I pray thee turn back at the top of the outgate,’ said he, ‘and be not venturesome. Thou wottest that the pitcher is not broken the first time it goeth to the well, nor maybe the twentieth, but at last it cometh not back.’

She said: ‘Nevertheless I shall have my will herein. And it is but a little way I will wend with thee.’

Therewith were they come to the scree, and talk fell down between them as they clomb it; but when they were in the darksome passage of the rocks, and could scarce see one another, Face-of-god said:

‘Where then is another outgate from the Dale? Is it not up the water?’

‘Yea,’ she said, ‘and there is none other: at the lower end the rocks rise sheer from out the water, and a little further down is a great force thundering betwixt them; so that by no boat or raft may ye come out of the Dale. But the outgate up the water is called the Road of War, as this is named the Path of Peace. But now are all ways ways of war.’

‘There is peace in my heart,’ said Gold-mane.

She answered not for a while, but pressed his hand, and he felt her breath on his cheek; and even therewithal they came out of the dark, and Gold-mane saw that her cheek was flushed; and now she spake:

‘One thing would I say to thee, my friend. Thou hast seen me amongst men of war, amongst outlaws who seek violence; thou hast heard me bid my brother to count the slain, and I shrinking not; thou knowest (for I have told thee) how I have schemed and schemed for victorious battle. Yet I would not have thee think of me as a Chooser of the Slain, a warrior maiden, or as of one who hath no joy save in the battle whereto she biddeth others. O friend, the many peaceful hours that I have had on the grass down yonder, sitting with my rock and spindle in hand, the children round about my knees hearkening to some old story so well remembered by me! or the milking of the kine in the dewy summer even, when all was still but for the voice of the water and the cries of the happy children, and there round about me were the dear and beauteous maidens with whom I had grown up, happy amidst all our troubles, since their life was free and they knew no guile. In such times my heart was at peace indeed, and it seemed to me as if we had won all we needed; as if war and turmoil were over, after they had brought about peace and good days for our little folk.

‘And as for the days that be, are they not as that rugged pass, full of bitter winds and the voice of hurrying waters, that leadeth yonder to Silver-dale, as thou hast divined? and there is nought good in it save that the breath of life is therein, and that it leadeth to pleasant places and the peace and plenty of the fair dale.’

‘Sweet friend,’ he said, ‘what thou sayest is better than well: for time shall be, if we come alive out of this pass of battle and bitter strife, when I shall lead thee into Burgdale to dwell

there. And thou wottest of our people that there is little strife and grudging amongst them, and that they are merry, and fair to look on, both men and women; and no man there lacketh what the earth may give us, and it is a saying amongst us that there may a man have that which he desireth save the sun and moon in his hands to play with: and of this gladness, which is made up of many little matters, what story may be told? Yet amongst it shall I live and thou with me; and ill indeed it were if it wearied thee and thou wert ever longing for some day of victorious strife, and to behold me coming back from battle high-raised on the shields of men and crowned with bay; if thine ears must ever be tickled with the talk of men and their songs concerning my warrior deeds. For thus it shall not be. When I drive the herds it shall be at the neighbours' bidding whereso they will; not necks of men shall I smite, but the stalks of the tall wheat, and the boles of the timber-trees which the woodreeve hath marked for felling; the stilts of the plough rather than the hilts of the sword shall harden my hands; my shafts shall be for the deer, and my spears for the wood-boar, till war and sorrow fall upon us, and I fight for the ceasing of war and trouble. And though I be called a chief and of the blood of chiefs, yet shall I not be masterful to the goodman of the Dale, but rather to my hound; for my chieftainship shall be that I shall be well beloved and trusted, and that no man shall grudge against me. Canst thou learn to love such a life, which to me seemeth lovely? And thou? of whom I say that thou art as if thou wert come down from the golden chairs of the Burg of the Gods.'

They were well-nigh out of the steep path by now, and the daylight was bright about them; there she stayed her feet a moment and turned to him and said:

'All this should I love even now, if the grief of our Folk were but healed, and hereafter shall I learn yet more of thy well-beloved face.'

Therewith she laid her face to his and kissed him fondly, and put his hand to her side and held it there, saying: 'Soon shall we be one in body and in soul.'

And he laughed with joy and pride of life, and took her hand and led her on again, and said:

'Yet feel the cold rings of my hauberk, my friend; look at the spears that cumber my hand, and at Dale-warden hanging by my side. Thou shalt yet see me as the Slain's Chooser would see her speech-friend; for there is much to do ere we win wheat-harvest in Burgdale.'

Therewith they stepped together on to the level ground of the waste, and saw Bow-may sitting on a stone hard by, and Wood-wise standing beside her bending his bow. Bow-may smiled on Gold-mane and rose up, and they all went on together, turning so that they went nearly alongside the wall of the Vale, but westering a little; then the Sun-beam said:

'Many a time have I trodden this heath alongside our rock-wall; for if ye wend a little further as our faces are turned, ye come to the crags over the place where the Shivering Flood goeth out of Shadowy Vale. There when ye have clomb a little may'st thou stand on the edge of the rock-wall, and look down and behold the Flood swirling and eddying in the black gorge of the rocks, and see presently the reek of the force go up, and hear the thunder of the waters as they pour over it: and all this about us now is as the garden of our house—is it not so, Bow-may?'

'Yea,' said she, 'and there are goodly cluster-berries to be gotten hereabout in the autumn; many a time have the Sun-beam and I reddened our lips with them. Yet is it best to be wary when war is abroad and hot withal.'

'Yea,' said the Sun-beam, 'and all this place comes into the story of our House: lo! Gold-mane, two score paces before us a little on our right hand those five grey stones. They are called the Rocks of the Elders: for there in the first days of our abiding in Shadowy Vale the Elders were wont to come together to talk privily upon our matters.'

Face-of-god looked thither as she spoke, but therewith saw Bow-may, who went on the left hand of the Sun-beam, as Face-of-god on her right hand, notch a shaft on her bent bow, and Wood-wise, who was on his right hand, saw it also and did the like, and therewithal Face-of-god got his target on to his arm, and even as he did so Bow-may cried out suddenly:

'Yea, yea! Cast thyself on to the ground, Sun-beam! Gold-mane, targe and spear, targe and spear! For I see steel gleaming yonder out from behind the Elders' Rocks.'

Scarce were the words out of her mouth ere three shafts came flying, and the bow-strings twanged. Gold-mane felt that one smote his helm and glanced from it. Therewithal he saw the Sun-beam fall to earth, though he knew not if she had but cast herself down as Bow-may bade. Bow-may's string twanged at once, and a yell came from the foemen: but Wood-wise loosed not, but set his hand to his mouth and gave a loud wild cry—Ha! ha! ha! ha! How-ow-ow!—ending in a long and exceeding great whoop like nought but the wolf's howl. Now

Gold-mane thinking swiftly, in a moment of time, as war-meet men do, judged that if the Sun-beam were hurt (and she had made no cry), it were yet wiser to fall on the foe before turning to tend her, or else all might be lost; so he rushed forward spear in hand and target on arm, and saw, as he opened up the flank of the Elders' Rocks, six men, whereof one leaned aback on the rock with Bow-may's shaft in his shoulder, and two others were just in act of loosing at him. In a moment, as he rushed at them, one shaft went whistling by him, and the other glanced from off his target; he cast a spear as he bounded on, and saw it smite one of the shooters full in the naked face, and saw the blood spout out and change his face and the man roll over, and then in another moment four men were hewing at him with their short steel axes. He thrust out his target against them, and then let the weight of his body come on his other spear, and drove it through the second shooter's throat, and even therewith was smitten on the helm so hard that, though the Alderman's work held out, he fell to his knees, holding his target over his head and striving to draw forth Dale-warden; in that nick of time a shaft whistled close by his ear, and as he rose to his feet again he saw his foeman rolling over and over, clutching at the ling with both hands. Then rang out again the terrible wolf-whoop from Wood-wise's mouth, and both he and Bow-may loosed a shaft, for the two other foes had turned their backs and were fleeing fast. Again Bow-may hit the clout, and the Dusky Man fell dead at once, but Wood-wise's arrow flew over the felon's shoulder as he ran. Then in a trice was Gold-mane bounding after him like the hare just roused from her form; for it came into his head that these felons had beheld them coming up out of the Vale, and that if even this one man escaped, he would bring his company down upon the Vale-dwellers.

Strong and light-foot as any was Face-of-god, and though he was cumbered with his hauberk, yet was Iron-face's handiwork far lighter than the war-coat of the Dusky Man, and the race was soon over. The felon turned breathless to meet Gold-mane, who drove his target against him and cast him to earth, and as he strove to rise smote off his head at one stroke; for Dale-warden was a good sword and the Dalesman as fierce of mood as might be. There he let the felon lie, and, turning, walked back swiftly toward the Elders' Rocks, and found there Wood-wise and the dead foemen, for the carle had slain the wounded, and he was now drawing the silver arm-rings off the slain men; for all these Dusky Felons bore silver arm-rings. But Bow-may was walking towards the Sun-beam, and thitherward followed Gold-mane speedily.

He found her sitting on a tussock of grass close by where she had fallen, her face pale, her eyes eager and gleaming; she looked up at him as he drew nigher and said:

'Friend, art thou hurt?'

'Nay,' he said, 'and thou? Thou art pale.'

'I am not hurt,' she said. Then she smiled and said again:

'Did I not tell thee that I am no warrior like Bow-may here? Such deeds make maidens pale.'

Said Bow-may: 'If ye will have the truth, Gold-mane, she is not wont to grow pale when battle is nigh her. Look you, she hath had the gift of a new delight, and findeth it sweeter and softer than she had any thought of; and now hath she feared lest it should be taken from her.'

'Bow-may saith but the sooth,' said the Sun-beam simply, 'and kind it is of her to say it. I saw thee, Bow-may, and good was thy shooting, and I love thee for it.'

Said Bow-may: 'I never shoot otherwise than well. But those idle shooters of the Dusky Ones, whereabouts nigh to thee went their shafts?'

Said the Sun-beam: 'One just lifted the hair by my left ear, and that was not so ill-aimed; as for the other, it pierced my raiment by my right knee, and pinned me to the earth, so that I tottered and fell, and my gown and smock are grievously wounded, both of them.'

And she took the folds of the garments in her hands to show the rents therein; and her colour was come again, and she was glad.

'What were best to do now?' she said.

Said Face-of-god: 'Let us tarry a little; for some of thy carles shall surely come up from the Vale: because they will have heard Wood-wise's whoop, since the wind sets that way.'

'Yea, they will come,' said the Sun-beam.

'Good is that,' said Face-of-god; 'for they shall take the dead felons and cast them where they be not seen if perchance any more stray hereby. For if they wind them, they may well happen on the path down to the Vale. Also, my friend, it were well if thou wert to bid a good few of the carles that are in the Vale to keep watch and ward about here, lest there be more

foemen wandering about the waste.'

She said: 'Thou art wise in war, Gold-mane; I will do as thou biddest me. But soothly this is a perilous thing that the Dusky Men are gotten so close to the Vale.'

Said Face-of-god: 'This will Folk-might look to when he cometh home; and it is most like that he will deem it good to fall on them somewhere a good way aloof, so as to draw them off from wandering over the waste. Also I will do my best to busy them when I am home in Burgdale.'

Therewith came up Wood-wise, and fell to talk with them; and his mind it was that these foemen were but a band of strayers, and had had no inkling of Shadowy Vale till they had heard them talking together as they came up the path from the Vale, and that then they had made that ambush behind the Elders' Rocks, so that they might slay the men, and then bear off the woman. He said withal that it would be best to carry their corpses further on, so that they might be cast over the cliffs into the fierce stream of the Shivering Flood.

Amidst this talk came up men from the Vale, a score of them, well armed; and they ran to meet the wayfarers; and when they heard what had befallen, they rejoiced exceedingly, and were above all glad that Face-of-god had shown himself doughty and deft; and they deemed his rede wise, to set a watch thereabouts till Folk-might came home, and said that they would do even so.

Then spake the Sun-beam and said:

'Now must ye wayfarers depart; for the road is but rough, and the day not over-long.'

Then she turned to Face-of-god and put her hand on his shoulder, and brought her face close to his and spake to him softly:

'Doth this second parting seem at all strange to thee, and that I am now so familiar to thee, I whom thou didst once deem to be a very goddess? And now thou hast seen me redden before thine eyes because of thee; and thou hast seen me grow pale with fear because of thee; and thou hast felt my caresses which I might not refrain; even as if I were altogether such a maiden as ye warriors hang about for a nine days' wonder, and then all is over save an aching heart—wilt thou do so with me? Tell me, have I not belittled myself before thee as if I asked thee to scorn me? For thus desire dealeth both with maid and man.'

He said: 'In all this there is but one thing for me to say, and that is that I love thee; and surely none the less, but rather the more, because thou lovest me, and art of my kind, and mayest share in my deeds and think well of them. Now is my heart full of joy, and one thing only weigheth on it; and that is that my kinswoman the Bride begrudgeth our love together. For this is the thing that of all things most misliketh me, that any should bear a grudge against me.'

She said: 'Forget not the token, and my message to her.'

'I will not forget it,' said he. 'And now I bid thee to kiss me even before all these that are looking on; for there is nought to belittle us therein, since we be troth-plight.'

And indeed those folk stood all round about them gazing on them, but a little aloof, that they might not hear their words if they were minded to talk privily. For they had long loved the Sun-beam, and now the love of Face-of-god had begun to spring up in their hearts.

So the twain embraced and kissed one another, and made no haste thereover; and those men deemed that but meet and right, and clashed their weapons on their shields in token of their joy.

Then Face-of-god turned about and strode out of the ring of men, with Bow-may and Wood-wise beside him, and they went on their journey over the necks towards Burgstead. But the Sun-beam turned slowly from that place toward the Vale, and two of the stoutest carles went along with her to guard her from harm, and she went down into the Vale pondering all these things in her heart.

Then the other carles dragged off the corpses of the Dusky Men till they had brought them to the sheer rocks above the Shivering Flood, and there they tossed them over into the boiling caldron of the force, and so departed taking with them the silver arm-rings of the slain to add to the tale.

But when they came back into the Vale the Sun-beam duly ordered that watch and ward to keep the ingate thereto, and note all that should befall till Folk-might came home.

CHAPTER XXII. FACE-OF-GOD COMETH HOME TO BURGSTEAD.

But Face-of-god with Bow-may and Wood-wise fared over the waste, going at first alongside the cliffs of the Shivering Flood, and then afterwards turning somewhat to the west. They soon had to climb a very high and steep bent going up to a mountain-neck; and the way over the neck was rough indeed when they were on it, and they toiled out of it into a barren valley, and out of the valley again on to a rough neck; and such-like their journey the day long, for they were going athwart all those great dykes that went from the ice-mountains toward the lower dales like the outspread fingers of a hand or the roots of a great tree. And the ice-mountains they had on their left hands and whiles at their backs.

They went very warily, with their bows bended and spear in hand, but saw no man, good or bad, and but few living things. At noon they rested in a valley where was a stream, but no grass, nought but stones and sand; but where they were at least sheltered from the wind, which was mostly very great in these high wastes; and there Bow-may drew meat and wine from a wallet she bore, and they ate and drank, and were merry enough; and Bow-may said:

‘I would I were going all the way with thee, Gold-mane; for I long sore to let my eyes rest a while on the land where I shall one day live.’

‘Yea,’ said Face-of-god, ‘art thou minded to dwell there? We shall be glad of that.’

‘Whither are thy wits straying?’ said she; ‘whether I am minded to it or not, I shall dwell there.’

And Wood-wise nodded a yea to her. But Face-of-god said:

‘Good will be thy dwelling; but wherefore must it be so?’

Then Wood-wise laughed and said: ‘I shall tell thee in fewer words than she will, and time presses now: Wood-father and Wood-mother, and I and my two brethren and this woman have ever been about and anigh the Sun-beam; and we deem that war and other troubles have made us of closer kin to her than we were born, whether ye call it brotherhood or what not, and never shall we sunder from her in life or in death. So when thou goest to Burgdale with her, there shall we be.’

Then was Face-of-god glad when he found that they deemed his wedding so settled and sure; but Wood-wise fell to making ready for the road. And Face-of-god said to him:

‘Tell me one thing, Wood-wise; that whoop that thou gavest forth when we were at handy-strokes e’en now—is it but a cry of thine own or is it of thy Folk, and shall I hear it again?’

‘Thou may’st look to hear it many a time,’ said Wood-wise, ‘for it is the cry of the Wolf. Seldom indeed hath battle been joined where men of our blood are, but that cry is given forth. Come now, to the road!’

So they went their ways and the road worsened upon them, and toilsome was the climbing up steep bents and the scaling of doubtful paths in the cliff-sides, so that the journey, though the distance of it were not so long to the fowl flying, was much eked out for them, and it was not till near nightfall that they came on the ghyll of the Weltering Water some six miles above Burgstead. Forsooth Wood-wise said that the way might be made less toilsome though far longer by turning back eastward a little past the vale where they had rested at midday; and that seemed good to Gold-mane, in case they should be wending hereafter in a great company between Burgdale and Shadowy Vale.

But now those two went with Face-of-god down a path in the side of the cliff whereby him-seemed he had gone before; and they came down into the ghyll and sat down together on a stone by the water-side, and Face-of-god spake to them kindly, for he deemed them good and trusty faring-fellows.

‘Bow-may,’ said he, ‘thou saidst a while ago that thou wouldst be fain to look on Burgdale; and indeed it is fair and lovely, and ye may soon be in it if ye will. Ye shall both be more than welcome to the house of my father, and heartily I bid you thither. For night is on us, and the way back is long and toilsome and beset with peril. Sister Bow-may, thou wottest that it would be a sore grief to me if thou camest to any harm, and thou also, fellow Wood-wise. Daylight is a good faring-fellow over the waste.’

Said Bow-may: ‘Thou art kind, Gold-mane, and that is thy wont, I know; and fain were I to-night of the candles in thine hall. But we may not tarry; for thou wottest how busy we be at home; and Sun-beam needeth me, if it were only to make her sure that no Dusky Man is bearing off thine head by its lovely locks. Neither shall we journey in the mirk night; for look you, the moon yonder.’

‘Well,’ said Face-of-god, ‘parting is ill at the best, and I would I could give you twain a gift, and especially to thee, my sister Bow-may.’

Said Wood-wise: ‘Thou may’st well do that; or at least promise the gift; and that is all one as if we held it in our hands.’

‘Yea,’ said Bow-may, ‘Wood-wise and I have been thinking in one way belike; and I was at point to ask a gift of thee.’

‘What is it?’ said Gold-mane. ‘Surely it is thine, if it were but a guerdon for thy good shooting.’

She laughed and handled the skirts of his hauberk as she said:

‘Show us the dint in thine helm that the steel axe made this morning.’

‘There is no such great dint,’ said he; ‘my father forged that helm, and his work is better than good.’

‘Yea,’ said Bow-may, ‘and might I have hauberk and helm of his handiwork, and Wood-wise a good sword of the same, then were I a glad woman, and this man a happy carle.’

Said Gold-mane: ‘I am well pleased at thine asking, and so shall Iron-face be when he heareth of thine archery; and how that Hall-face were now his only son but for thy close shooting. But now must I to the way; for my heart tells me that there may have been tidings in Burgstead this while I have been aloof.’

So they rose all three, and Bow-may said:

‘Thou art a kind brother, and soon shall we meet again; and that will be well.’

Then he put his hands on her shoulders and kissed both her cheeks; and he kissed Wood-wise, and turned and went his ways, threading the stony tangle about the Weltering Water, which was now at middle height, and running clear and strong; so turning once he beheld Wood-wise and Bow-may climbing the path up the side of the ghyll, and Bow-may turned to him also and waved her bow as token of farewell. Then he went upon his way, which was rough enough to follow by night, though the moon was shining brightly high aloft. Yet as he knew his road he made but little of it all, and in somewhat more than an hour and a half was come out of the pass into the broken ground at the head of the Dale, and began to make his way speedily under the bright moonlight toward the Gate, still going close by the water. But as he went he heard of a sudden cries and rumour not far from him, unwonted in that place, where none dwelt, and where the only folk he might look to see were those who cast an angle into the pools and eddies of the Water. Moreover, he saw about the place whence came the cries torches moving swiftly hither and thither; so that he looked to hear of new tidings, and stayed his feet and looked keenly about him on every side; and just then, between his rough path and the shimmer of the dancing moonlit water, he saw the moon smite on something gleaming; so, as quietly as he could, he got his target on his arm, and shortened his spear in his right hand, and then turned sharply toward that gleam. Even therewith up sprang a man on his right hand, and then another in front of him just betwixt him and the water; an axe gleamed bright in the moon, and he caught a great stroke on his target, and therewith drave his left shoulder straight forward, so that the man before him fell over into the water with a mighty splash; for they were at the very edge of the deepest eddy of the Water. Then he spun round on his heel, heeding not that another stroke had fallen on his right shoulder, yet ill-aimed, and not with the full edge, so that it ran down his byrny and rent it not. So he sent the thrust of his spear crashing through the face and skull of the smiter, and looked not to him as he fell, but stood still, brandishing his spear and crying out, ‘For the Burg and the Face! For the Burg and the Face!’

No other foe came against him, but like to the echo of his cry rose a clear shout not far aloof, ‘For the Face, for the Face! For the Burg and the Face!’ He muttered, ‘So ends the day as it begun,’ and shouted loud again, ‘For the Burg and the Face!’ And in a minute more came breaking forth from the stone-heaps into the moonlit space before the water the tall shapes of the men of Burgstead, the red torchlight and the moonlight flashing back from their war-gear and weapons; for every man had his sword or spear in hand.

Hall-face was the first of them, and he threw his arms about his brother and said: ‘Well met, Gold-mane, though thou comest amongst us like Stone-fist of the Mountain. Art thou hurt? With whom hast thou dealt? Where be they? Whence comest thou?’

‘Nay, I am not hurt,’ said Face-of-god. ‘Stint thy questions then, till thou hast told me whom thou seekest with spear and sword and candle.’

‘Two felons were they,’ said Hall-face, ‘even such as ye saw lying dead at Wood-grey’s the other day.’

‘Then may ye sheathe your swords and go home,’ said Gold-mane, ‘for one lieth at the bottom of the eddy, and the other, thy feet are well-nigh treading on him, Hall-face.’

Then arose a rumour of praise and victory, and they brought the torches nigh and looked at the fallen man, and found that he was stark dead; so they even let him lie there till the morrow, and all turned about toward the Thorp; and many looked on Face-of-god and wondered concerning him, whence he was and what had befallen him. Indeed, they would have asked him thereof, but could not get at him to ask; but whoso could, went as nigh to Hall-face and him as they might, to hearken to the talk between the brothers.

So as they went along Hall-face did verily ask him whence he came: ‘For was it not so,’ said he, ‘that thou didst enter into the wood seeking some adventure early in the morning the day before yesterday?’

‘Sooth is that,’ said Face-of-god, ‘and I came to Shadowy Vale, and thence am I come this morning.’

Said Hall-face: ‘I know not Shadowy Vale, nor doth any of us. This is a new word. How say ye, friends, doth any man here know of Shadowy Vale?’

They all said, ‘Nay.’

Then said Hall-face: ‘Hast thou been amongst mere ghosts and marvels, brother, or cometh this tale of thy minstrelsy?’

‘For all your words,’ said Gold-mane, ‘to that Vale have I been; and, to speak shortly (for I desire to have your tale, and am waiting for it), I will tell thee that I found there no marvels or strange wights, but a folk of valiant men; a folk small in numbers, but great of heart; a folk come, as we be, from the Fathers and the Gods. And this, moreover, is to be said of them, that they are the foes of these felons of whom ye were chasing these twain. And these same Dusky Men of Silver-dale would slay them every man if they might; and if we look not to it they will soon be doing the same by us; for they are many, and as venomous as adders, as fierce as bears, and as foul as swine. But these valiant men, who bear on their banner the image of the Wolf, should be our fellows in arms, and they have good will thereto; and they shall show us the way to Silver-dale by blind paths, so that we may fall upon these felons while they dwell there tormenting the poor people of the land, and thus may we destroy them as lads a hornet’s nest. Or else the days shall be hard for us.’

The men who hung about them drank in his words greedily. But Hall-face was silent a little while, and then he said: ‘Brother Gold-mane, these be great tidings. Time was when we might have deemed them but a minstrel’s tale; for Silver-dale we know not, of which thou speakest so glibly, nor the Dusky Men, any more than the Shadowy Vale. Howbeit, things have befallen these two last days so strange and new, that putting them together with the murder at Wood-grey’s, and thy words which seem somewhat wild, it may well seem to us that tidings unlooked for are coming our way.’

‘Come, then,’ said Face-of-god, ‘give me what thou hast in thy scrip, and trust me, I shall not jeer at thy tale.’

Said Hall-face: ‘I also will be short with the tale; and that the more, as meseemeth it is not yet done, and that thou thyself shalt share in the ending of it. It was the day before yesterday, that is the day when thou departedst into the woods on that adventure whereof thou shalt one day tell me more, wilt thou not?’

‘Yea, in good time,’ said Face-of-god.

‘Well,’ quoth Hall-face, ‘we went into the woods that day and in the morning, but after sunrise, to the number of a score: we looked to meet a bear and a she-bear with cubs in a certain place; for one of the Woodlanders, a keen hunter, had told us of their lair. Also we were wishful to slay some of the wild-swine, the yearlings, if we might. Therefore, though we had no helms or shields or coats of fence, we had bowshot a plenty, and good store of casting-weapons, besides our wood-knives and an axe or so; and some of us, of whom I was one, bore our battle-swords, as we are wont ever to do, be the foe beast or man.

‘Thus armed we went up Wildlake’s Way and came to Carlstead, where half-a-score Woodlanders joined themselves to us, so that we became a band. We went up the half-cleared places past Carlstead for a mile, and then turned east into the wood, and went I know not how far, for the Woodlanders led us by crooked paths, but two hours wore away in our going, till we

came to the place where they looked to find the bears. It is a place that may well be noted, for it is unlike the wood round about. There is a close thicket some two furlongs about of thorn and briar and ill-grown ash and oak and other trees, planted by the birds belike; and it stands as it were in an island amidst of a wide-spreading woodlawn of fine turf, set about in the most goodly fashion with great tall straight-boled oak-trees, that seem to have been planted of set purpose by man's hand. Yea, dost thou know the place?"

'Methinks I do,' said Gold-mane, 'and I seem to have heard the Woodlanders give it a name and call it Boars-bait.'

'That may be,' said Hall-face. 'Well, there we were, the dogs and the men, and we drew nigh the thicket and beset it, and doubted not to find prey therein: but when we would set the dogs at the thicket to enter it, they were uneasy, and would not take up the slot, but growled and turned about this way and that, so that we deemed that they wined some fierce beast at our flanks or backs.

'Even so it was, and fierce enough and deadly was the beast; for suddenly we heard bow-strings twang, and shafts came flying; and Iron-shield of the Upper Dale, who was close beside me, leapt up into the air and fell down dead with an arrow through his back. Then I bethought me in the twinkling of an eye, and I cried out, "The foe are on us! take the cover of the tree-boles and be wary! For the Burg and the Face! For the Burg and the Face!"

'So we scattered and covered ourselves with the oak-boles, but besides Iron-shield, who was slain outright, two goodmen were sorely hurt, to wit Bald-face, a man of our house, and Stonyford of the Lower Dale.

'I looked from behind my tree-bole, a great one; and far off down the glades I saw men moving, clad in gay raiment; but nearer to me, not a hundred yards from my cover, I saw an arm clad in scarlet come out from behind a tree-bole, so I loosed at it, and missed not; for straight there tottered out from behind the tree one of those dusky foul-favoured men like to those that were slain by Wood-grey. I had another shaft ready notched, so I loosed and set the shaft in his throat, and he fell.

'Straightway was a yelling and howling about us like the cries of scalded curs, and the oak-wood swarmed thick with these felons rushing on us; for it seems that the man whom I had slain was a chief amongst them, or we judged so by his goodly raiment.

'Methought then our last day was come. What could we do but run together again after we had loosed at a venture, and so withstand them sword and spear in hand? Some fell beneath our shot, but not many, for they came on very swiftly.

'So they fell on us; but for all their fierceness and their numbers they might not break our array, and we slew four and hurt many by sword-hewing and spear-casting and push of spear; and five of us were hurt and one slain by their dart-casting. So they drew off from us a little, and strove to spread out and fall to shooting at us again; but this we would not suffer, but pushed on as they fell back, keeping as close together as we might for the trees. For we said that we would all die together if needs must; and verily the stout was hard.

'Yet hearken! In that nick of time rose up a strange cry not far from us, Ha! ha! ha! ha! How-ow-ow! ending like the howl of a wolf, and then another and another and another, till the whole wood rang again.

'At first we deemed that here were come fresh foemen, and that we were undone indeed; but when they heard it, the foe-men before us faltered and gave way, and at last turned their backs and fled, and we followed, keeping well together still: thereby the more part of these men escaped us, for they fled wildly here and there from those who bore that cry with them; so we knew that our work was being done for us; therefore we stood, and saw tall men clad in sheep-brown weed running through the glades pursuing those felons and smiting them down, till both fliers and pursuers passed out of our sight like men in a dream, or as when ye roll up a pictured cloth to lay it in the coffer.

'But to Stone-face's mind those brown-clad men were the Wights of the Wood that be of the Fathers' blood, and our very friends; and when some of us would yet have gone forward and foregathered with them, and followed the chase along with them, Stone-face gainsaid it, bidding us not to run into the arms of a second death, when we had but just escaped from the first. Sooth to say, moreover, we had divers hurt men that needed looking to.

'So what with one thing, what with another, we turned back: but War-cliff's brother, a tall man, had felled two of those felons with an oak sapling which he had torn from the thicket; but he had not slain them, and by now they were just awakening from their swoon, and were

sitting up looking round them with fierce rolling eyes, expecting the stroke, for Raven of Longscree was standing over them with a naked war-sword in his hand. But now that our blood was cool, we were loth to slay them as they lay in our hands; so we bound them and brought them away with us; and our own dead we carried also on such biers as we might lightly make there, and with them three that were so grievously hurt that they might not go afoot, these we left at Carlstead: they were Tardy the Son of the Untamed, and Swan of Bull-meadow, both of the Lower Dale, and a Woodlander, Undoomed to wit. But the dead were Iron-shield aforesaid, and Wool-sark, and the Hewan, a Woodlander.

‘So came we sadly at eventide to Burgstead with the two dead Burgdalers, and the captive felons, and the wounded of us that might go afoot; and ye may judge that they of Burgdale and our father deemed these tidings great enough, and wotted not what next should befall. Stone-face would have had those two felons slain there and then; for no true tale could we get out of them, nor indeed any word at all. But the Alderman would not have it so; and he deemed they might serve our turn as hostages if any of our folk should be taken: for one and all we deemed, and still deem, that war is on us and that new folk have gathered on our skirts.

‘So the captives were shut up in the red out-bower of our house; and our father was minded that thou mightest tell us somewhat of them when thou wert come home. But about dusk to-day the word went that they had broken out and gotten them weapons and fled up the Dale; and so it was.

‘But to-morrow morning will a Gate-thing be holden, and there it will be looked for of thee that thou tell us a true tale of thy goings. For it is deemed, and it is my deeming especially, that thou may’st tell us more of these men than thou hast yet told us. Is it not so?’

‘Yea, surely,’ said Gold-mane, ‘I can make as many words as ye will about it; yet when all is said, it will come to much the same tale as I have already told thee. Yet belike, if ye are minded to take up the sword to defend you, I may tell you in what wise to lay hold on the hilts.’

‘And that is well,’ said Hall-face, ‘and no less do I look for of thee. But lo! here are we come to the Gate of the Burg that abideth battle.’

CHAPTER XXIII. TALK IN THE HALL OF THE HOUSE OF THE FACE.

In sooth they were come to the very Gate of Burgstead, and the great gates were shut, and only a wicket was open, and a half score of stout men in all their war-gear were holding ward thereby. They gave place to Hall-face and his company, albeit some of the warders followed them through the wicket that they might hear the story told.

The street was full of folk, both men and women, talking together eagerly concerning all these tidings, and when they saw the men of the Hue-and-cry they came thronging about them, so that they might scarce get to the door of the House of the Face because of the press; so Hall-face (who was a very tall man) cried out:

‘Good people, all is well! the runaways are slain, and Face-of-god is come back with us; give place a little, that we may come into our house.’

Then the throng set up a shout, and made way a little, so that Hall-face and Gold-mane and the others could get to the door. And they entered into the Hall, and saw much folk therein; and men were sitting at table, for supper was not yet over. But when they saw the new-comers they mostly rose up from the board and stood silent to hear the tale, for they had been talking many together each to each, so that the Hall was full of confused noise.

So Hall-face again cried out: ‘Men in this hall, good is the tidings. The runaways are slain; and it was Face-of-god who slew them as he came back safe from the waste.’

Then they shouted for joy, and the brethren and Stone-face with them (for he had entered with them from the street) went up on to the dais, while the others of the Hue-and-cry gat them seats where they might at the endlong tables.

But when Face-of-god came up on to the dais, there sat Iron-face looking down on the thronged Hall with a ruddy cheerful countenance, and beside him sat the Bride; for he had caused her to be brought thither when he had heard of the tidings of battle. She was daintily clad in a flame-coloured kirtle embroidered with gold about the bosom and sleeves, and there was a fillet of golden roses on her ruddy hair. Her eyes shone bright and eager, and the pommels of her cheeks were flushed and red contrary to their wont. Needs must Gold-mane sit by her, and when he came close to her he knew not what to do, but he put forth his hand to her, yet with a troubled countenance; for he feared her grief mingled with her beauty: as

for her, she wavered in her mind whether she should forbear to touch him or not; but she saw that men about were looking at them, and especially was Iron-face looking on her: therefore she stood up and took Gold-mane's hand and kissed his face as she had been wont to do, and by then was her face as white as paper; and her anguish pierced his heart, so that he well-nigh groaned for grief of her. But Iron-face looked on her and said kindly:

'Kinswoman, thou art pale; thou hast feared for thy mate amidst all these tidings of war, and still fearest for him. But pluck up a heart; for the man is a deft warrior for all his fair face, which thou lovest as a woman should, and his hands may yet save his head. And if he be slain, yet are there other men of the kindred, and the earth will not be a desert to thee even then.'

She looked at Iron-face, and the colour was come back to her face somewhat, and she said:

'It is true; I have feared for him; for he goeth into perilous places. But for thee, thou art kind, and I thank thee for it.'

And therewith she kissed Iron-face and sat down in her place, and strove to overmaster her grief, that her face might not be changed by it; for now were thoughts of battle, and valiant hopes arising in men's hearts; and it seemed to her too grievous if she should mar that feast on the eve of battle.

But Iron-face kissed and embraced his son and said: 'Art thou late come from the waste? Hast thou seen new things? We look to have a notable tale from thee; though here also have been tidings, and it is not unlike that we shall presently have new work on our hands.'

'Father,' quoth Face-of-god, 'I deem that when thou hast heard my tale thou wilt think no less of it than that there are valiant folk to be holpen, poor folk to be delivered, and evil folk to be swept from off the face of the earth.'

'It is well, son,' said Iron-face. 'I see that thy tale is long; let it alone for to-night. To-morrow shall we hold a Gate-thing, and then shall we hear all that thou hast to tell. Now eat thy meat and drink a bowl of wine, and comfort thy troth-plight maiden.'

So Gold-mane sat down by the Bride, and ate and drank as he needs must; but he was ill at ease and he durst not speak to her. For, on the one hand, he thought concerning his love for the Sun-beam, and how sweet and good a thing it was that she should take him by the hand and lead him into noble deeds and great fame, caressing him so softly and sweetly the while; and, on the other hand, there sat the Bride beside him, sorrowful and angry, begrudging all that sweetness of love, as though it were something foul and unseemly; and heavy on him lay the weight of that grudge, for he was a man of a friendly heart.

Stone-face sat outward from him on the other side of the Bride; and he leaned across her towards Gold-mane and said:

'Fair shall be thy tale to-morrow, if thou tellest us all thine adventure. Or wilt thou tell us less than all?'

Said Face-of-god: 'In good time shalt thou know it all, foster-father; but it is not unlike that by the time that thou hast heard it, there shall be so many other things to tell of, that my tale shall seem of little account to thee—even as the saw saith that one nail driveth out the other.'

'Yea,' said Stone-face, 'but one tale belike shall be knit up with the others, as it fareth with the figures that come one after other on the weaver's cloth; though one maketh not the other, yet one cometh of the other.'

Said Face-of-god: 'Wise art thou now, foster-father, but thou shalt be wiser yet in this matter by then a month hath worn: and to-morrow shalt thou know enough to set thine hands a-work.'

So the talk fell between them; and the night wore, and the men of Burgdale feasted in their ancient hall with merry hearts, little weighed down by thought of the battle that might be and the trouble to come; for they were valorous and kindly folk.

CHAPTER XXIV. FACE-OF-GOD GIVETH THAT TOKEN TO THE BRIDE.

Now on the morrow, when Face-of-god arose and other men with him, and the Hall was astir and there was no little throng therein, the Bride came up to him; for she had slept in the House of the Face by the bidding of the Alderman; and she spake to him before all men, and bade him come forth with her into the garden, because she would speak to him apart. He yeasaid

her, though with a heavy heart; and to the folk about that seemed meet and due, since those twain were deemed to be troth-plight, and they smiled kindly on them as they went out of the Hall together.

So they came into the garden, where the pear-trees were blossoming over the spring lilies, and the cherries were showering their flowers on the deep green grass, and everything smelled sweetly on the warm windless spring morning.

She led the way, going before him till they came by a smooth grass path between the berry bushes, to a square space of grass about which were barberry trees, their first tender leaves bright green in the sun against the dry yellowish twigs. There was a sundial amidmost of the grass, and betwixt the garden-boughs one could see the long grey roof of the ancient hall; and sweet familiar sounds of the nesting birds and men and women going on their errands were all about in the scented air. She turned about at the sundial and faced Face-of-god, her hand lightly laid on the scored brass, and spake with no anger in her voice:

‘I ask thee if thou hast brought me the token whereon thou shalt swear to give me that gift.’

‘Yea,’ said he; and therewith drew the ring from his bosom, and held it out to her. She reached out her hand to him slowly and took it, and their fingers met as she did so, and he noted that her hand was warm and firm and wholesome as he well remembered it.

She said: ‘Whence hadst thou this fair finger-ring?’

Said Face-of-god: ‘My friend there in the mountain-valley drew it from off her finger for thee, and bade me bear thee a message.’

Her face flushed red: ‘Yea,’ she said, ‘and doth she send me a message? Then doth she know of me, and ye have talked of me together. Well, give the message!’

Said Face-of-god: ‘She saith, that thou shalt bear in mind, That to-morrow is a new day.’

‘Yea,’ she said, ‘for her it is so, and for thee; but not for me. But now I have brought thee here that thou mightest swear thine oath to me; lay thine hand on this ring and on this brazen plate whereby the sun measures the hours of the day for happy folk, and swear by the spring-tide of the year and all glad things that find a mate, and by the God of the Earth that rejoiceth in the life of man.’

Then he laid his hand on the finger-ring as it lay on the dial-plate and said:

‘By the spring-tide and the live things that long to multiply their kind; by the God of the Earth that rejoiceth in the life of man, I swear to give to my kinswoman the Bride the second man-child that I beget; to be hers, to leave or cherish, to love or hate, as her will may bid her.’ Then he looked on her soberly and said: ‘It is duly sworn; is it enough?’

‘Yea,’ she said; but he saw how the tears ran out of her eyes and wetted the bosom of her kirtle, and she hung her head for shame of her grief. And Gold-mane was all abashed, and had no word to say; for he knew that no word of his might comfort her; and he deemed it ill done to stay there and behold her sorrow; and he knew not how to get him gone, and be glad elsewhere, and leave her alone.

Then, as if she had read his thought, she looked up at him and said smiling a little amidst of her tears:

‘I bid thee stay by me till the flood is over; for I have yet a word to say to thee.’

So he stood there gazing down on the grass in his turn, and not daring to raise his eyes to her face, and the minutes seemed long to him: till at last she said in a voice scarcely yet clear of weeping:

‘Wilt thou say anything to me, and tell me what thou hast done, and why, and what thou deemest will come of it?’

He said: ‘I will tell the truth as I know it, because thou askest it of me, and not because I would excuse myself before thee. What have I done? Yesterday I plighted my troth to wed the woman that I met last autumn in the wood. And why? I wot not why, but that I longed for her. Yet I must tell thee that it seemed to me, and yet seemeth, that I might do no otherwise—that there was nothing else in the world for me to do. What do I deem will come of it, sayest thou? This, that we shall be happy together, she and I, till the day of our death.’

She said: ‘And even so long shall I be sorry: so far are we sundered now. Alas! who looked for it? And whither shall I turn to now?’

Said Gold-mane: ‘She bade me tell thee that to-morrow is a new day: meseemeth I know her meaning.’

‘No word of hers hath any meaning to me,’ said the Bride.

‘Nay,’ said he, ‘but hast thou not heard these rumours of war that are in the Dale? Shall not these things avail thee? Much may grow out of them; and thou with the mighty heart, so faithful and compassionate!’

She said: ‘What sayest thou? What may grow out of them? Yea, I have heard those rumours as a man sick to death heareth men talk of their business down in the street while he lieth on his bed; and already he hath done with it all, and hath no world to mend or mar. For me nought shall grow out of it. What meanest thou?’

Said Gold-mane: ‘Is there nought in the fellowship of Folks, and the aiding of the valiant, and the deliverance of the hapless?’

‘Nay,’ she said, ‘there is nought to me. I cannot think of it to-day nor yet to-morrow belike. Yet true it is that I may mingle in it, though thinking nought of it. But this shall not avail me.’

She was silent a little, but presently spake and said: ‘Thou sayest right; it is not thou that hast done this, but the woman who sent me the ring and the message of an old saw. O that she should be born to sunder us! How hath it befallen that I am now so little to thee and she so much?’

And again she was silent; and after a while Face-of-god spake kindly and softly and said: ‘Kinswoman, wilt thou for ever begrudge our love? this grudge lieth heavy on my soul, and it is I alone that have to bear it.’

She said: ‘This is but a light burden for thee to bear, when thou hast nought else to bear! But do I begrudge thee thy love, Gold-mane? I know not that. Rather meseemeth I do not believe in it—nor shall do ever.’

Then she held her peace a long while, nor did he speak one word: and they were so still, that a robin came hopping about them, close to the hem of her kirtle, and a starling pitched in the apple-tree hard by and whistled and chuckled, turning about and about, heeding them nought. Then at last she lifted up her face from looking on the grass and said: ‘These are idle words and avail nothing; one thing only I know, that we are sundered. And now it repenteth me that I have shown thee my tears and my grief and my sickness of the earth and those that dwell thereon. I am ashamed of it, as if thou hadst smitten me, and I had come and shown thee the stripes, and said, See what thou hast done! hast thou no pity? Yea, thou pitiest me, and wilt try to forget thy pity. Belike thou art right when thou sayest, To-morrow is a new day; belike matters will arise that will call me back to life, and I shall once more take heed of the joy and sorrow of my people. Nay, it is most like that this I shall feign to do even now. But if to-morrow be a new day, it is to-day now and not to-morrow, and so shall it be for long. Hereof belike we shall talk no more, thou and I. For as the days wear, the dealings between us shall be that thou shalt but get thee away from my life, and I shall be nought to thee but the name of a kinswoman. Thus should it be even wert thou to strive to make it otherwise; and thou shalt *not* strive. So let all this be; for this is not the word I had to say to thee. But hearken! now are we sundered, and it irketh me beyond measure that folk know it not, and are kind, and rejoice in our love, and deem it a happy thing for the folk; and this burden I may bear no longer. So I shall declare unto men that I will not wed thee; and belike they may wonder why it is, till they see thee wedded to the Woman of the Mountain. Art thou content that so it shall be?’

Said Face-of-god: ‘Nay, thou shalt not take this all upon thyself; I also shall declare unto the Folk that I will wed none but her, the Mountain-Woman.’

She said: ‘This shalt thou not do; I forbid it thee. And I *will* take it all upon myself. Shall I have it said of me that I am unmeet to wed thee, and that thou hast found me out at last and at latest? I lay this upon thee, that wheresoever I declare this and whatsoever I may say, thou shalt hold thy peace. This at least thou may’st do for me. Wilt thou?’

‘Yea,’ he said, ‘though it shall put me to shame.’

Again she was silent for a little; then she said:

‘O Gold-mane, this would I take upon myself not soothly for any shame of seeming to be thy cast-off; but because it is I who needs must bear all the sorrow of our sundering; and I have the will to bear it greater and heavier, that I may be as the women of old time, and they that have come from the Gods, lest I belittle my life with malice and spite and confusion, and it become poisonous to me. Be at peace! be at peace! And leave all to the wearing of the

years; and forget not that which thou hast sworn!’

Therewith she turned and went from that green place toward the House of the Face, walking slowly through the garden amongst the sweet odours, beneath the fair blossoms, a body most dainty and beauteous of fashion, but the casket of grievous sorrow, which all that goodness availed not.

But Face-of-god lingered in that place a little, and for that little while the joy of his life was dulled and overworn; and the days before his wandering on the mountain seemed to him free and careless and happy days that he could not but regret. He was ashamed, moreover, that this so unquenchable grief should come but of him, and the pleasure of his life, which he himself had found out for himself, and which was but such a little portion of the Earth and the deeds thereof. But presently his thought wandered from all this, and as he turned away from the sundial and went his ways through the garden, he called to mind his longing for the day of the spring market, when he should see the Sun-beam again and be cherished by the sweetness of her love.

CHAPTER XXV. OF THE GATE-THING AT BURGSTEAD.

But now must he hasten, for the Gate-thing was to be holden two hours before noon; so he betook him speedily to the Hall, and took his shield and did on a goodly helm and girt his sword to his side, for men must needs go to all folk-motes with their weapons and clad in war-gear. Thus he went forth to the Gate with many others, and there already were many folk assembled in the space aforesaid betwixt the Gate of the Burg and the sheer rocks on the face of which were the steps that led up to the ancient Tower on the height. The Alderman was sitting on the great stone by the Gate-side which was his appointed place, and beside him on the stone bench were the six Wardens of the Burg; but of the six Wardens of the Dale there were but three, for the others had not yet heard tell of the battle or had got the summons to the Thing, since they had been about their business down the Dale.

Face-of-god took his place silently amongst the neighbours, but men made way for him, so that he must needs stand in front, facing his father and the Wardens; and there went up a murmur of expectation round about him, both because the word had gone about that he had a tale of new tidings to tell, and also because men deemed him their best and handiest man, though he was yet so young.

Now the Alderman looked around and beheld a great throng gathered together, and he looked on the shadow of the Gate which the southering sun was casting on the hard white ground of the Thing-stead, and he saw that it had just taken in the standing-stone which was in the midst of the place. On the face of the said stone was carven the image of a fighting man with shield on arm and axe in hand; for it had been set there in old time in memory of the man who had bidden the Folk build the Gate and its wall, and had showed them how to fashion it: for he was a deft house-smith as well as a great warrior; and his name was Iron-hand. So when the Alderman saw that this stone was wholly within the shadow of the Gate he knew that it was the due time for the hallowing-in of the Thing. So he bade one of the wardens who sat beside him and had a great slug-horn slung about him, to rise and set the horn to his mouth.

So that man arose and blew three great blasts that went bellowing about the towers and down the street, and beat back again from the face of the sheer rocks and up them and over into the wild-wood; and the sound of it went on the light west-wind along the lips of the Dale toward the mountain wastes. And many a goodman, when he heard the voice of the horn in the bright spring morning, left spade or axe or plough-stilts, or the foddering of the ewes and their younglings, and turned back home to fetch his sword and helm and hasten to the Thing, though he knew not why it was summoned: and women wending over the meadows, who had not yet heard of the battle in the wood, hearkened and stood still on the green grass or amidst the ripples of the ford, and the threat of coming trouble smote heavy on their hearts, for they knew that great tidings must be towards if a Thing must needs be summoned so close to the Great Folk-mote.

But now the Alderman stood up and spake amidst the silence that followed the last echoes of the horn:

‘Now is hallowed in this Gate-thing of the Burgstead Men and the Men of the Dale, wherein they shall take counsel concerning matters late befallen, that press hard upon them. Let no man break the peace of the Holy Thing, lest he become a man accursed in holy places from the

plain up to the mountain, and from the mountain down to the plain; a man not to be cherished of any man of good will, not be holpen with victuals or edge-tool or draught-beast; a man to be sheltered under no roof-tree, and warmed at no hearth of man: so help us the Warrior and the God of the Earth, and Him of the Face, and all the Fathers!’

When he had spoken men clashed their weapons in token of assent; and he sat down again, and there was silence for a space. But presently came thrusting forward a goodman of the Dale, who seemed as if he had come hurriedly to the Thing; for his face was running down with sweat, his wide-rimmed iron cap sat awry over his brow, and he was girt with a rusty sword without a scabbard, and the girdle was ill-braced up about his loins. So he said:

‘I am Red-coat of Waterless of the Lower Dale. Early this morning as I was going afield I met on the way a man akin to me, Fox of Upton to wit, and he told me that men were being summoned to a Gate-thing. So I turned back home, and caught up any weapon that came handy, and here I am, Alderman, asking thee of the tidings which hath driven thee to call this Thing so hard on the Great Folk-mote, for I know them nothing so.’

Then stood up Iron-face the Alderman and said: ‘This is well asked, and soon shall ye be as wise as I am on this matter. Know ye, O men of Burgstead and the Dale, that we had not called this Gate-thing so hard on the Great Folk-mote had not great need been to look into troublous matters. Long have ye dwelt in peace, and it is years on years now since any foeman hath fallen on the Dale: but, as ye will bear in mind, last autumn were there ransackings in the Dale and amidst of the Shepherds after the manner of deeds of war; and it troubleth us that none can say who wrought these ill deeds. Next, but a little while ago, was Wood-grey, a valiant goodman of the Woodlanders, slain close to his own door by evil men. These men we took at first for mere gangrel felons and outcasts from their own folk: though there were some who spoke against that from the beginning.

‘But thirdly are new tidings again: for three days ago, while some of the folk were hunting peaceably in the Wild-wood and thinking no evil, they were fallen upon of set purpose by a host of men-at-arms, and nought would serve but mere battle for dear life, so that many of our neighbours were hurt, and three slain outright; and now mark this, that those who there fell upon our folk were clad and armed even as the two felons that slew Wood-grey, and moreover were like them in aspect of body. Now stand forth Hall-face my son, and answer to my questions in a loud voice, so that all may hear thee.’

So Hall-face stood forth, clad in gleaming war-gear, with an axe over his shoulder, and seemed a doughty warrior. And Iron-face said to him:

‘Tell me, son, those whom ye met in the wood, and of whom ye brought home two captives, how much like were they to the murder-carles at Wood-grey’s?’

Said Hall-face: ‘As like as peas out of the same cod, and to our eyes all those whom we saw in the wood might have been sons of one father and one mother, so much alike were they.’

‘Yea,’ said the Alderman; ‘now tell me how many by thy deeming fell upon you in the wood?’

Said Hall-face: ‘We deemed that if they were any less than threescore, they were little less.’

‘Great was the odds,’ said the Alderman. ‘Or how many were ye?’

‘One score and seven,’ said Hall-face.

Said the Alderman: ‘And yet ye escaped with life all save those three?’

Hall-face said: ‘I deem that scarce one should have come back alive, had it not been that as we fought came a noise like the howling of wolves, and thereat the foemen turned and fled, and there followed on the fleers tall men clad in sheep-brown raiment, who smote them down as they fled.’

‘Here then is the story, neighbours,’ said the Alderman, ‘and ye may see thereby that if those slayers of Wood-grey were outcast, their band is a great one; but it seemeth rather that they were men of a folk whose craft it is to rob with the armed hand, and to slay the robbed; and that they are now gathering on our borders for war. Yet, moreover, they have foemen in the woods who should be fellows-in-arms of us. How sayest thou, Stone-face? Thou art old, and hast seen many wars in the Dale, and knowest the Wild-wood to its innermost.

‘Alderman,’ said Stone-face, ‘and ye neighbours of the Dale, maybe these foes whom ye have met are not of the race of man, but are trolls and wood-wights. Now if they be trolls it is ill, for then is the world growing worser, and the wood shall be right perilous for those who needs must fare therein. Yet if they be men it is a worse matter; for the trolls would not come out of the waste into the sunlight of the Dale. But these foes, if they be men, are lusting after

our fair Dale to eat it up, and it is most like that they are gathering a huge host to fall upon us at home. Such things I have heard of when I was young, and the aspect of the evil men who overran the kindreds of old time, according to all tales and lays that I have heard, is even such as the aspect of those whom we have seen of late. As to those wolves who saved the neighbours and chased their foemen, there is one here who belike knoweth more of all this than we do, and that, O Alderman, is thy son whom I have fostered, Face-of-god to wit. Bid him answer to thy questioning, and tell us what he hath seen and heard of late; then shall we verily know the whole story as far as it can be known.'

Then men pressed round, and were eager to hear what Face-of-god would be saying. But or ever the Alderman could begin to question him, the throng was cloven by new-comers, and these were the men who had been sent to bring home the corpses of the Dusky Men: so they had cast loaded hooks into the Weltering Water, and had dragged up him whom Face-of-god had shoved into the eddy, and who had sunk like a stone just where he fell, and now they were bringing him on a bier along with him who had been slain a-land. They were set down in the place before the Alderman, and men who had not seen them before looked eagerly on them that they might behold the aspect of their foemen; and nought lovely were they to look on; for the drowned man was already bleached and swollen with the water, and the other, his face was all wryed and twisted with that spear-thrust in the mouth.

Then the Alderman said: 'I would question my son Face-of-god. Let him stand forth!'

And therewith he smiled merrily in his son's face, for he was standing right in front of him; and he said:

'Ask of me, Alderman, and I will answer.'

'Kinsman,' said Iron-face, 'look at these two dead men, and tell me, if thou hast seen any such besides those two murder-carles who were slain at Carlstead; or if thou knowest aught of their folk?'

Said Face-of-god: 'Yesterday I saw six others like to these both in array and of body, and three of them I slew, for we were in battle with them early in the morning.'

There was a murmur of joy at this word, since all men took these felons for deadly foemen; but Iron-face said: 'What meanest thou by "we"?''

'I and the men who had guested me overnight,' said Face-of-god, 'and they slew the other three; or rather a woman of them slew the felons.'

'Valiant she was; all good go with her hand!' said the Alderman. 'But what be these people, and where do they dwell?'

Said Face-of-god: 'As to what they are, they are of the kindred of the Gods and the Fathers, valiant men, and guest-cherishing; rich have they been, and now are poor: and their poverty cometh of these same felons, who mastered them by numbers not to be withstood. As to where they dwell: when I say the name of their dwelling-place men mock at me, as if I named some valley in the moon: yet came I to Burgdale thence in one day across the mountain-necks led by sure guides, and I tell thee that the name of their abode is Shadowy Vale.'

'Yea,' said Iron-face, 'knoweth any man here of Shadowy Vale, or where it is?'

None answered for a while; but there was an old man who was sitting on the shafts of a wain on the outskirts of the throng, and when he heard this word he asked his neighbour what the Alderman was saying, and he told him. Then said that elder:

'Give me place; for I have a word to say hereon.' Therewith he arose, and made his way to the front of the ring of men, and said: 'Alderman, thou knowest me?'

'Yea,' said Iron-face, 'thou art called the Fiddle, because of thy sweet speech and thy minstrelsy; whereof I mind me well in the time when I was young and thou no longer young.'

'So it is,' said the Fiddle. 'Now hearken! When I was very young I heard of a vale lying far away across the mountain-necks; a vale where the sun shone never in winter and scantily in summer; for my sworn foster-brother, Fight-fain, a bold man and a great hunter, had happened upon it; and on a day in full midsummer he brought me thither; and even now I see the Vale before me as in a picture; a marvellous place, well grassed, treeless, narrow, betwixt great cliff-walls of black stone, with a green river running through it towards a yawning gap and a huge force. Amidst that Vale was a doom-ring of black stones, and nigh thereto a feast-hall well builded of the like stones, over whose door was carven the image of a wolf with red gaping jaws, and within it (for we entered into it) were stone benches on the dais. Thence we came away, and thither again we went in late autumn, and so dusk and cold it was at that season,

that we knew not what to call it save the valley of deep shade. But its real name we never knew; for there was no man there to give us a name or tell us any tale thereof; but all was waste there; the wimbrel laughed across its water, the raven croaked from its crags, the eagle screamed over it, and the voices of its waters never ceased; and thus we left it. So the seasons passed, and we went thither no more: for Fight-fain died, and without him wandering over the waste was irksome to me; so never have I seen that valley again, or heard men tell thereof.

‘Now, neighbours, have I told you of a valley which seemeth to be Shadowy Vale; and this is true and no made-up story.’

The Alderman nodded kindly to him, and then said to Face-of-god: ‘Kinsman, is this word according with what thou knowest of Shadowy Vale?’

‘Yea, on all points,’ said Face-of-god; ‘he hath put before me a picture of the valley. And whereas he saith, that in his youth it was waste, this also goeth with my knowledge thereof. For once was it peopled, and then was waste, and now again is it peopled.’

‘Tell us then more of the folk thereof,’ said the Alderman; ‘are they many?’

‘Nay,’ said Face-of-god, ‘they are not. How might they be many, dwelling in that narrow Vale amid the wastes? But they are valiant, both men and women, and strong and well-liking. Once they dwelt in a fair dale called Silver-dale, the name whereof will be to you as a name in a lay; and there were they wealthy and happy. Then fell upon them this murderous Folk, whom they call the Dusky Men; and they fought and were overcome, and many of them were slain, and many enthralled, and the remnant of them escaped through the passes of the mountains and came back to dwell in Shadowy Vale, where their forefathers had dwelt long and long ago; and this overthrow befell them ten years ago. But now their old foemen have broken out from Silver-dale and have taken to scouring the wood seeking prey; so they fall upon these Dusky Men as occasion serves, and slay them without pity, as if they were adders or evil dragons; and indeed they be worse. And these valiant men know for certain that their foemen are now of mind to fall upon this Dale and destroy it, as they have done with others nigher to them. And they will slay our men, and lie with our women against their will, and enthrall our children, and torment all those that lie under their hands till life shall be worse than death to them. Therefore, O Alderman and Wardens, and ye neighbours all, it behoveth you to take counsel what we shall do, and that speedily.’

There was again a murmur, as of men nothing daunted, but intent on taking some way through the coming trouble. But no man said aught till the Alderman spake:

‘When didst thou first happen upon this Earl-folk, son?’

‘Late last autumn,’ said Face-of-god.

Said Iron-face: ‘Then mightest thou have told us of this tale before.’

‘Yea,’ said his son, ‘but I knew it not, or but little of it, till two days ago. In the autumn I wandered in the woodland, and on the fell I happened on a few of this folk dwelling in a booth by the pine-wood; and they were kind and guest-fain with me, and gave me meat and drink and lodging, and bade me come to Shadowy Vale in the spring, when I should know more of them. And that was I fain of; for they are wise and goodly men. But I deemed no more of those that I saw there save as men who had been outlawed by their own folk for deeds that were unlawful belike, but not shameful, and were biding their time of return, and were living as they might meanwhile. But of the whole Folk and their foemen knew I no more than ye did, till two days ago, when I met them again in Shadowy Vale. Also I think before long ye shall see their chieftain in Burgstead, for he hath a word for us. Lastly, my mind it is that those brown-clad men who helped Hall-face and his company in the wood were nought but men of this Earl-kin seeking their foemen; for indeed they told me that they had come upon a battle in the woodland wherein they had slain their foemen. Now have I told you all that ye need to know concerning these matters.’

Again was there silence as Iron-face sat pondering a question for his son; then a goodman of the Upper Dale, Gritgarth to wit, spake and said:

‘Gold-mane mine, tell us how many is this folk; I mean their fighting-men?’

‘Well asked, neighbour,’ said Iron-face.

Said Face-of-god: ‘Their fighting-men of full age may be five score; but besides that there shall be some two or three score of women that will fight, whoever says them nay; and many of these are little worse in the field than men; or no worse, for they shoot well in the bow. Moreover, there will be a full score of swains not yet twenty winters old whom ye may not hinder

to fight if anything is a-doing.'

'This is no great host,' said the Alderman; 'yet if they deem there is little to lose by fighting, and nought to gain by sitting still, they may go far in winning their desire; and that more especially if they may draw into their quarrel some other valiant Folk more in number than they be. I marvel not, though, they were kind to thee, son Gold-mane, if they knew who thou wert.'

'They knew it,' said Face-of-god.

'Neighbours,' said the Alderman, 'have ye any rede hereon, and aught to say to back your rede?'

Then spake the Fiddle: 'As ye know and may see, I am now very old, and, as the word goes, unmeet for battle: yet might I get me to the field, either on mine own legs or on the legs of some four-foot beast, I would strike, if it were but one stroke, on these pests of the earth. And, Alderman, meseemeth we shall do amiss if we bid not the Earl-folk of Shadowy Vale to be our fellows in arms in this adventure. For look you, how few soever they be, they will be sure to know the ways of our foemen, and the mountain passes, and the surest and nighest roads across the necks and the mires of the waste; and though they be not a host, yet shall they be worth a host to us?'

When men heard his words they shouted for joy of them; for hatred of the Dusky Men who should so mar their happy life in the Dale was growing up in them, and the more that hatred waxed, the more waxed their love of those valiant ones.

Now Red-coat of Waterless spake again: he was a big man, both tall and broad, ruddy-faced and red-haired, some forty winters old. He said:

'Life hath been well with us of the Lower Dale, and we deem that we have much to lose in losing it. Yet ill would the bargain be to buy life with thralldom: we have been over-merry hitherto for that. Therefore I say, to battle! And as to these men, these well-wishers of Face-of-god, if they also are minded for battle with our foes, we were fools indeed if we did not join them to our company, were they but one score instead of six.'

Men shouted again, and they said that Red-coat had spoken well. Then one after other the goodmen of the Dale came and gave their word for fellowship in arms with the Men of Shadowy Vale, if there were such as Face-of-god had said, which they doubted not; and amongst them that spake were Fox of Nethertown, and Warwell, and Gritgarth, and Bearswein, and Warcliff, and Hart of Highcliff, and Worm of Willowholm, and Bullsbane, and Highneb of the Marsh: all these were stout men-at-arms and men of good counsel.

Last of all the Alderman spake and said:

'As to the war, that must we needs meet if all be sooth that we have heard, and I doubt it not.

'Now therefore let us look to it like wise men while time yet serves. Ye shall know that the muster of the Dalesmen will bring under shield eight long hundreds of men well-armed, and of the Shepherd-Folk four hundreds, and of the Woodlanders two hundreds; and this is a goodly host if it be well ordered and wisely led. Now am I your Alderman and your Doomster, and I can heave up a sword as well as another maybe, nor do I think that I shall blench in the battle; yet I misdoubt me that I am no leader or orderer of men-of-war: therefore ye will do wisely to choose a wiser man-at-arms than I be for your War-leader; and if at the Great Folk-mote, when all the Houses and Kindreds are gathered, men yeasay your choosing, then let him abide; but if they naysay it, let him give place to another. For time presses. Will ye so choose?'

'Yea, yea!' cried all men.

'Good is that, neighbours,' said the Alderman. 'Whom will ye have for War-leader? Consider well.'

Short was their rede, for every man opened his mouth and cried out 'Face-of-god!' Then said the Alderman:

'The man is young and untried; yet though he is so near akin to me, I will say that ye will do wisely to take him; for he is both deft of his hands and brisk; and moreover, of this matter he knoweth more than all we together. Now therefore I declare him your War-leader till the time of the Great Folk-mote.'

Then all men shouted with great glee and clashed their weapons; but some few put their heads together and spake apart a little while, and then one of them, Red-coat of Waterless to

wit, came forward and said: 'Alderman, some of us deem it good that Stone-face, the old man wise in war and in the ways of the Wood, should be named as a counsellor to the War-leader; and Hall-face, a very brisk and strong young man, to be his right hand and sword-bearer.'

'Good is that,' said Iron-face. 'Neighbours, will ye have it so?' This also they yeasaid without delay, and the Alderman declared Stone-face and Hall-face the helpers of Face-of-god in this business. Then he said:

'If any hath aught to say concerning what is best to be done at once, it were good that he said it now before all and not to murmur and grudge hereafter.'

None spake save the Fiddle, who said: 'Alderman and War-leader, one thing would I say: that if these foemen are anywise akin to those overrunners of the Folks of whom the tales went in my youth (for I also as well as Stone-face mind me well of those tales concerning them), it shall not avail us to sit still and await their onset. For then may they not be withstood, when they have gathered head and burst out and over the folk that have been happy, even as the waters that overtop a dyke and cover with their muddy ruin the deep green grass and the flower-buds of spring. Therefore my rede is, as soon as may be to go seek these folk in the woodland and wheresoever else they may be wandering. What sayest thou, Face-of-god?'

'My rede is as thine,' said he; 'and to begin with, I do now call upon ten tens of good men to meet me in arms at the beginning of Wildlake's Way to-morrow morning at daybreak; and I bid my brother Hall-face to summon such as are most meet thereto. For this I deem good, that we scour the wood daily at present till we hear fresh tidings from them of Shadowy Vale, who are nigher than we to the foemen. Now, neighbours, are ye ready to meet me?'

Then all shouted, 'Yea, we will go, we will go!'

Said the Alderman: 'Now have we made provision for the war in that which is nearest to our hands. Yet have we to deal with the matter of the fellowship with the Folk whom Face-of-god hath seen. This is a matter for thee, son, at least till the Great Folk-mote is holden. Tell me then, shall we send a messenger to Shadowy Vale to speak with this folk, or shall we abide the chieftain's coming?'

'By my rede,' said Face-of-god, 'we shall abide his coming: for first, though I might well make my way thither, I doubt if I could give any the bearings, so that he could come there without me; and belike I am needed at home, since I am become War-leader. Moreover, when your messenger cometh to Shadowy Vale, he may well chance to find neither the chieftain there, nor the best of his men; for whiles are they here, and whiles there, as they wend following after the Dusky Men.'

'It is well, son,' said the Alderman, 'let it be as thou sayest: soothly this matter must needs be brought before the Great Folk-mote. Now will I ask if any other hath any word to say, or any rede to give before this Gate-thing sundereth?'

But no man came forward, and all men seemed well content and of good heart; and it was now well past noontide.

CHAPTER XXVI. THE ENDING OF THE GATE-THING.

But just as the Alderman was on the point of rising to declare the breaking-up of the Thing, there came a stir in the throng and it opened, and a warrior came forth into the innermost of the ring of men, arrayed in goodly glittering War-gear; clad in such wise that a tunic of precious gold-wrought web covered the hauberk all but the sleeves thereof, and the hem of it beset with blue mountain-stones smote against the ankles and well-nigh touched the feet, shod with sandals gold-embroidered and gemmed. This warrior bore a goodly gilded helm on the head, and held in hand a spear with gold-garlanded shaft, and was girt with a sword whose hilts and scabbard both were adorned with gold and gems: beardless, smooth-cheeked, exceeding fair of face was the warrior, but pale and somewhat haggard-eyed: and those who were nearby beheld and wondered; for they saw that there was come the Bride arrayed for war and battle, as if she were a messenger from the House of the Gods, and the Burg that endureth for ever.

Then she fell to speech in a voice which at first was somewhat hoarse and broken, but cleared as she went on, and she said:

'There sittest thou, O Alderman of Burgdale! Is Face-of-god thy son anywhere nigh, so that he can hear me?'

But Iron-face wondered at her word, and said: 'He is beside thee, as he should be.' For

indeed Face-of-god was touching her, shoulder to shoulder. But she looked not to the right hand nor the left, but said:

‘Hearken, Iron-face! Chief of the House of the Face, Alderman of the Dale, and ye also, neighbours and goodmen of the Dale: I am a woman called the Bride, of the House of the Steer, and ye have heard that I have plighted my troth to Face-of-god to wed with him, to love him, and lie in his bed. But it is not so: we are not troth-plight; nor will I wed with him, nor any other, but will wend with you to the war, and play my part therein according to what might is in me; nor will I be worse than the wives of Shadowy Vale.’

Face-of-god heard her words with no change of countenance; but Iron-face reddened over all his face, and stared at her, and knit his brows and said:

‘Maiden, what are these words? What have we done to thee? Have I not been to thee as a father, and loved thee dearly? Is not my son goodly and manly and deft in arms? Hath it not ever been the wont of the House of the Face to wed in the House of the Steer? and in these two Houses there hath never yet been a goodlier man and a lovelier maiden than are ye two. What have we done then?’

‘Ye have done nought against me,’ she said, ‘and all that thou sayest is sooth; yet will I not wed with Face-of-god.’

Yet fiercer waxed the face of the Alderman, and he said in a loud voice:

‘But how if I tell thee that I will speak with thy kindred of the Steer, and thou shalt do after my bidding whether thou wilt or whether thou wilt not?’

‘And how will ye compel me thereto?’ she said. ‘Are there thralls in the Dale? Or will ye make me an outlaw? Who shall heed it? Or I shall betake me to Shadowy Vale and become one of their warrior-maidens.’

Now was the Alderman’s face changing from red to white, and belike he forgot the Thing, and what he was doing there, and he cried out:

‘This is an evil day, and who shall help me? Thou, Face-of-god, what hast thou to say? Wilt thou let this woman go without a word? What hath bewitched thee?’

But never a word spake his son, but stood looking straight forward, cold and calm by seeming. Then turned Iron-face again to the Bride, and said in a softer voice:

‘Tell me, maiden, whom I erst called daughter, what hath befallen, that thou wilt leave my son; thou who wert once so kind and loving to him; whose hand was always seeking his, whose eyes were ever following his; who wouldst go where he bade, and come when he called. What hath betid that ye have cast him out, and flee from our House?’

She flushed red beneath her helm and said:

‘There is war in the land, and I have seen it coming, and that things shall change around us. I have looked about me and seen men happy and women content, and children weary for mere mirth and joy. And I have thought, in a day, or two days or three, all this shall be changed, and the women shall be, some anxious and wearied with waiting, some casting all hope away; and the men, some shall come back to the garth no more, and some shall come back maimed and useless, and there shall be loss of friends and fellows, and mirth departed, and dull days and empty hours, and the children wandering about marvelling at the sorrow of the house. All this I saw before me, and grief and pain and wounding and death; and I said: Shall I be any better than the worst of the folk that loveth me? Nay, this shall never be; and since I have learned to be deft with mine hands in all the play of war, and that I am as strong as many a man, and as hardy-hearted as any, I will give myself to the Warrior and the God of the Face; and the battle-field shall be my home, and the after-grief of the fight my banquet and holiday, that I may bear the burden of my people, in the battle and out of it; and know every sorrow that the Dale hath; and cast aside as a grievous and ugly thing the bed of the warrior that the maiden desires, and the toying of lips and hands and soft words of desire, and all the joy that dwelleth in the Castle of Love and the Garden thereof; while the world outside is sick and sorry, and the fields lie waste and the harvest burneth. Even so have I sworn, even so will I do.’

Her eyes glittered and her cheek was flushed, and her voice was clear and ringing now; and when she ended there arose a murmur of praise from the men round about her. But Iron-face said coldly:

‘These are great words; but I know not what they mean. If thou wilt to the field and fight among the carles (and that I would not naysay, for it hath oft been done and praised aforetime),

why shouldest thou not go side by side with Face-of-god and as his plighted maiden?’

The light which the sweetness of speech had brought into her face had died out of it now, and she looked weary and hapless as she answered him slowly:

‘I will not wed with Face-of-god, but will fare afield as a virgin of war, as I have sworn to the Warrior.’

Then waxed Iron-face exceeding wroth, and he rose up before all men and cried loudly and fiercely:

‘There is some lie abroad, that windeth about us as the gossamers in the lanes of an autumn morning.’

And therewith he strode up to Face-of-god as though he had nought to do with the Thing; and he stood before him and cried out at him while all men wondered:

‘Thou! what hast thou done to turn this maiden’s heart to stone? Who is it that is devising guile with thee to throw aside this worthy wedding in a worthy House, with whom our sons are ever wont to wed? Speak, tell the tale!’

But Face-of-god held his peace and stood calm and proud before all men.

Then the blood mounted to Iron-face’s head, and he forgot folk and kindred and the war to come, and he cried so that all the place rang with the words of his anger:

‘Thou dastard! I see thee now; it is thou that hast done this, and not the maiden; and now thou hast made her bear a double burden, and set her on to speak for thee, whilst thou standest by saying nought, and wilt take no scruple’s weight of her shame upon thee!’

But his son spake never a word, and Iron-face cried: ‘Out on thee! I know thee now, and why thou wouldest not to the West-land last winter. I am no fool; I know thee. Where hast thou hidden the stranger woman?’

Therewith he drew forth his sword and hove it aloft as if to hew down Face-of-god, who spake not nor flinched nor raised a hand from his side. But the Bride threw herself in front of Gold-mane, while there arose an angry cry of ‘The Peace of the Holy Thing! Peace-breaking, peace-breaking!’ and some cried, ‘For the War-leader, the War-leader!’ and as men could for the press they drew forth their swords, and there was tumult and noise all over the Thingstead.

But Stone-face caught hold of the Alderman’s right arm and dragged down the sword, and the big carle, Red-coat of Waterless, came up behind him and cast his arms about his middle and drew him back; and presently he looked around him, and slowly sheathed his sword, and went back to his place and sat him down; and in a little while the noise abated and swords were sheathed, and men waxed quiet again, and the Alderman arose and said in a loud voice, but in the wonted way of the head man of the Thing:

‘Here hath been trouble in the Holy Thing; a violent man hath troubled it, and drawn sword on a neighbour; will the neighbours give the dooming hereof into the hands of the Alderman?’

Now all knew Iron-face, and they cried out, ‘That will we.’ So he spake again:

‘I doom the troubler of the Peace of the Holy Thing to pay a fine, to wit double the blood-wite that would be duly paid for a full-grown freeman of the kindreds.’

Then the cry went up and men yeasaid his doom, and all said that it was well and fairly doomed; and Iron-face sat still.

But Stone-face stood forth and said:

‘Here have been wild words in the air; and dreams have taken shape and come amongst us, and have bewitched us, so that friends and kin have wrangled. And meseemeth that this is through the wizardry of these felons, who, even dead as they are, have cast spells over us. Good it were to cast them into the Death Tarn, and then to get to our work; for there is much to do.’

All men yeasaid that; and Forkbeard of Lea went with those who had borne the corpses thither to cast them into the black pool.

But the Fiddle spake and said:

‘Stone-face sayeth sooth. O Alderman, thou art no young man, yet am I old enough to be thy father; so will I give thee a rede, and say this: Face-of-god thy son is no liar or dastard or beguiler, but he is a young man and exceeding goodly of fashion, well-spoken and kind; so that few women may look on him and hear him without desiring his kindness and love, and to such men as this many things happen. Moreover, he hath now become our captain, and

is a deft warrior with his hands, and as I deem, a sober and careful leader of men; therefore we need him and his courage and his skill of leading. So rage not against him as if he had done an ill deed not to be forgiven—whatever he hath done, whereof we know not—for life is long before him, and most like we shall still have to thank him for many good deeds towards us. As for the maiden, she is both lovely and wise. She hath a sorrow at her heart, and we deem that we know what it is. Yet hath she not lied when she said that she would bear the burden of the griefs of the people. Even so shall she do; and whether she will, or whether she will not, that shall heal her own griefs. For to-morrow is a new day. Therefore, if thou do after my rede, thou wilt not meddle betwixt these twain, but wilt remember all that we have to do, and that war is coming upon us. And when that is over, we shall turn round and behold each other, and see that we are not wholly what we were before; and then shall that which were hard to forgive, be forgotten, and that which is remembered be easy to forgive.'

So he spake; and Iron-face sat still and put his left hand to his beard as one who pondereth; but the Bride looked in the face of the old man the Fiddle, and then she turned and looked at Gold-mane, and her face softened, and she stood before the Alderman, and bent down before him and held out both her hands to him the palms upward. Then she said: 'Thou hast been wroth with me, and I marvel not; for thy hope, and the hope which we all had, hath deceived thee. But kind indeed hast thou been to me ere now: therefore I pray thee take it not amiss if I call to thy mind the oath which thou swearest on the Holy Boar last Yule, that thou wouldst not gainsay the prayer of any man if thou couldst perform it; therefore I bid thee naysay not mine: and that is, that thou wilt ask me no more about this matter, but wilt suffer me to fare afield like any swain of the Dale, and to deal so with my folk that they shall not hinder me. Also I pray thee that thou wilt put no shame upon Face-of-god my playmate and my kinsman, nor show thine anger to him openly, even if for a little while thy love for him be abated. No more than this will I ask of thee.'

All men who heard her were moved to the heart by her kindness and the sweetness of her voice, which was like to the robin singing suddenly on a frosty morning of early winter. But as for Gold-mane, his heart was smitten sorely by it, and her sorrow and her friendliness grieved him out of measure.

But Iron-face answered after a little while, speaking slowly and hoarsely, and with the shame yet clinging to him of a man who has been wroth and has speedily let his wrath run off him. So he said:

'It is well, my daughter. I have no will to forswear myself; nor hast thou asked me a thing which is over-hard. Yet indeed I would that to-day were yesterday, or that many days were worn away.'

Then he stood up and cried in a loud voice over the throng:

'Let none forget the muster; but hold him ready against the time that the Warden shall come to him. Let all men obey the War-leader, Face-of-god, without question or delay. As to the fine of the peace-breaker, it shall be laid on the altar of the God at the Great Folk-mote. Herewith is the Thing broken up.'

Then all men shouted and clashed their weapons, and so sundered, and went about their business.

And the talk of men it was that the breaking of the troth-plight between those twain was ill; for they loved Face-of-god, and as for the Bride they deemed her the Dearest of the kindreds and the Jewel of the Folk, and as if she were the fairest and the kindest of all the Gods. Neither did the wrath of Iron-face mislike any; but they said he had done well and manly both to be wroth and to let his wrath run off him. As to the war which was to come, they kept a good heart about it, and deemed it as a game to be played, wherein they might show themselves deft and valiant, and so get back to their merry life again.

So wore the day through afternoon to even and night.

CHAPTER XXVII. FACE-OF-GOD LEADETH A BAND THROUGH THE WOOD.

Next morning tryst was held faithfully, and an hundred and a half were gathered together on Wildlake's Way; and Face-of-god ordered them into three companies. He made Hall-face leader over the first one, and bade him hold on his way northward, and then to make for Boars-bait and see if he should meet with anything thereabout where the battle had been. Red-coat of Waterless he made captain of the second band; and he had it in charge to wend eastward

along the edge of the Dale, and not to go deep into the wood, but to go as far as he might within the time appointed, toward the Mountains. Furthermore, he bade both Hall-face and Red-coat to bring their bands back to Wildlake's Way by the morrow at sunset, where other goodmen should be come to take the places of their men; and then if he and his company were back again, he would bid them further what to do; but if not, as seemed likely, then Hall-face's band to go west toward the Shepherd country half a day's journey, and so back, and Red-coat's east along the Dale's lip again for the like time, and then back, so that there might be a constant watch and ward of the Dale kept against the Felons.

All being ordered Gold-mane led his own company north-east through the thick wood, thinking that he might so fare as to come nigh to Silver-dale, or at least to hear tidings thereof. This intent he told to Stone-face, but the old man shook his head and said:

'Good is this if it may be done; but it is not for everyone to go down to Hell in his lifetime and come back safe with a tale thereof. However, whither thou wilt lead, thither will I follow, though assured death waylayeth us.'

And the old carle was joyous and proud to be on this adventure, and said, that it was good indeed that his foster-son had with him a man well stricken in years, who had both seen many things, and learned many, and had good rede to give to valiant men.

So they went on their ways, and fared very warily when they were gotten beyond those parts of the wood which they knew well. By this time they were strung out in a long line; and they noted their road carefully, blazing the trees on either side when there were trees, and piling up little stone-heaps where the trees failed them. For Stone-face said that oft it befell men amidst the thicket and the waste to be misled by wights that begrudged men their lives, so that they went round and round in a ring which they might not depart from till they died; and no man doubted his word herein.

All day they went, and met no foe, nay, no man at all; nought but the wild things of the wood; and that day the wood changed little about them from mile to mile. There were many thickets across their road which they had to go round about; so that to the crow flying over the tree-tops the journey had not been long to the place where night came upon them, and where they had to make the wood their bedchamber.

That night they lighted no fire, but ate such cold victual as they might carry with them; nor had they shot any venison, since they had with them more than enough; they made little noise or stir therefore and fell asleep when they had set the watch.

On the morrow they arose betimes, and broke their fast and went their ways till noon: by then the wood had thinned somewhat, and there was little underwood betwixt the scrubby oak and ash which were pretty nigh all the trees about: the ground also was broken, and here and there rocky, and they went into and out of rough little dales, most of which had in them a brook of water running west and southwest; and now Face-of-god led his men somewhat more easterly; and still for some while they met no man.

At last, about four hours after noon, when they were going less warily, because they had hitherto come across nothing to hinder them, rising over the brow of a somewhat steep ridge, they saw down in the valley below them a half score of men sitting by the brook-side eating and drinking, their weapons lying beside them, and along with them stood a woman with her hands tied behind her back.

They saw at once that these men were of the Felons, so they that had their bows bent, loosed at them without more ado, while the others ran in upon them with sword and spear. The felons leapt up and ran scattering down the dale, such of them as were not smitten by the shafts; but he who was nighest to the woman, ere he ran, turned and caught up a sword from the ground and thrust it through her, and the next moment fell across the brook with an arrow in his back.

No one of the felons was nimble enough to escape from the fleet-foot hunters of Burgdale, and they were all slain there to the number of eleven.

But when they came back to the woman to tend her, she breathed her last in their hands: she was a young and fair woman, black-haired and dark-eyed. She had on her body a gown of rich web, but nought else: she had been bruised and sore mishandled, and the Burgdale carles wept for pity of her, and for wrath, as they straightened her limbs on the turf of the little valley. They let her lie there a little, whilst they searched round about, lest there should be any other poor soul needing their help, or any felon lurking thereby; but they found nought else save a bundle wherein was another rich gown and divers woman's gear, and sundry rings and jewels, and therewithal the weapons and war-gear of a knight, delicately wrought after

the Westland fashion: these seemed to them to betoken other foul deeds of these murderers. So when they had abided a while, they laid the dead woman in mould by the brookside, and buried with her the other woman's attire and the knight's gear, all but his sword and shield, which they had away with them: then they cast the carcasses of the felons into the brake, but brought away their weapons and the silver rings from their arms, which they wore like all the others of them whom they had fallen in with; and so went on their way to the north-east, full of wrath against those dastards of the Earth.

It was hard on sunset when they left the valley of murder, and they went no long way thence before they must needs make stay for the night; and when they had arrayed their sleeping-stead the moon was up, and they saw that before them lay the close wood again, for they had made their lair on the top of a little ridge.

There then they lay, and nought stirred them in the night, and betimes on the morrow they were afoot, and entered the abovesaid thicket, wherein two of them, keen hunters, had been aforetime, but had not gone deep into it. Through this wood they went all day toward the north-east, and met nought but the wild things therein. At last, when it was near sunset, they came out of the thicket into a small plain, or shallow dale rather, with no great trees in it, but thorn-brakes here and there where the ground sank into hollows; a little river ran through the midst of it, and winded round about a height whose face toward the river went down sheer into the water, but away from it sank down in a long slope to where the thick wood began again: and this height or burg looked well-nigh west.

Thitherward they went; but as they were drawing nigh to the river, and were on the top of a bent above a bushy hollow between them and the water, they espied a man standing in the river near the bank, who saw them not, because he was stooping down intent on something in the bank or under it: so they gat them speedily down into the hollow without noise, that they might get some tidings of the man.

Then Face-of-god bade his men abide hidden under the bushes and stole forward quietly up the further bank of the hollow, his target on his arm and his spear poised. When he was behind the last bush on the top of the bent he was within half a spear-cast of the water and the man; so he looked on him and saw that he was quite naked except for a clout about his middle.

Face-of-god saw at once that he was not one of the Dusky Men; he was a black-haired man, but white-skinned, and of fair stature, though not so tall as the Burgdale folk. He was busied in tickling trouts, and just as Face-of-god came out from the bush into the westering sunlight, he threw up a fish on to the bank, and looked up therewithal, and beheld the weaponed man glittering, and uttered a cry, but fled not when he saw the spear poised for casting.

Then Face-of-god spake to him and said: 'Come hither, Woodsman! we will not harm thee, but we desire speech of thee: and it will not avail thee to flee, since I have bowmen of the best in the hollow yonder.'

The man put forth his hands towards him as if praying him to forbear casting, and looked at him hard, and then came dripping from out the water, and seemed not greatly afraid; for he stooped down and picked up the trouts he had taken, and came towards Face-of-god stringing the last-caught one through the gills on to the withy whereon were the others: and Face-of-god saw that he was a goodly man of some thirty winters.

Then Face-of-god looked on him with friendly eyes and said:

'Art thou a foemen? or wilt thou be helpful to us?'

He answered in the speech of the kindreds with the hoarse voice of a much weather-beaten man:

'Thou seest, lord, that I am naked and unarmed.'

'Yet may'st thou bewray us,' said Face-of-god. 'What man art thou?'

Said the man: 'I am the runaway thrall of evil men; I have fled from Rose-dale and the Dusky Men. Hast thou the heart to hurt me?'

'We are the foemen of the Dusky Men,' said Face-of-God; 'wilt thou help us against them?'

The man knit his brows and said: 'Yea, if ye will give me your word not to suffer me to fall into their hands alive. But whence art thou, to be so bold?'

Said Face-of-god: 'We are of Burgdale; and I will swear to thee on the edge of the sword that thou shalt not fall alive into the hands of the Dusky Men.'

'Of Burgdale have I heard,' said the man; 'and in sooth thou seemest not such a man as

would bewray a hapless man. But now had I best bring you to some lurking-place where ye shall not be easily found of these devils, who now oft-times scour the woods hereabout.'

Said Face-of-god: 'Come first and see my fellows; and then if thou thinkest we have need to hide, it is well.'

So the man went side by side with him towards their lair, and as they went Gold-mane noted marks of stripes on his back and sides, and said: 'Sorely hast thou been mishandled, poor man!'

Then the man turned on him and said somewhat fiercely: 'Said I not that I had been a thrall of the Dusky Men? how then should I have escaped tormenting and scourging, if I had been with them for but three days?'

As he spake they came about a thorn-bush, and there were the Burgdale men down in the hollow; and the man said: 'Are these thy fellows? Call to mind that thou hast sworn by the edge of the sword not to hurt me.'

'Poor man!' said Face-of-god; 'these are thy friends, unless thou bewrayest us.'

Then he cried aloud to his folk: 'Here is now a good hap! this is a runaway thrall of the Dusky Men; of him shall we hear tidings; so cherish him all ye may.'

So the carles thronged about him and bestirred themselves to help him, and one gave him his surcoat for a kirtle, and another cast a cloak about him; and they brought him meat and drink, such as they had ready to hand: and the man looked as if he scarce believed in all this, but deemed himself to be in a dream. But presently he turned to Face-of-god and said:

'Now I see so many men and weapons I deem that ye have no need to skulk in caves to-night, though I know of good ones: yet shall ye do well not to light a fire till moon-setting; for the flame ye may lightly hide, but the smoke may be seen from far aloof.'

But they bade him to meat, and he needed no second bidding but ate lustily, and they gave him wine, and he drank a great draught and sighed as for joy. Then he said in a trembling voice, as though he feared a naysay:

'If ye are from Burgdale ye shall be faring back again presently; and I pray you to take me with you.'

Said Face-of-god: 'Yea surely, friend, that will we do, and rejoice in thee.'

Then he drank another cup which Warcliff held out to him, and spake again: 'Yet if ye would abide here till about noon to-morrow, or mayhappen a little later, I would bring other runaways to see you; and them also might ye take with you: ye may think when ye see them that ye shall have small gain of their company; for poor wretched folk they be, like to myself. Yet since ye seek for tidings, herein might they do you more service than I; for amongst them are some who came out of the hapless Dale within this moon; and it is six months since I escaped. Moreover, though they may look spent and outworn now, yet if ye give them a little rest, and feed them well, they shall yet do many a day's work for you: and I tell you that if ye take them for thralls, and put collars on their necks, and use them no worse than a goodman useth his oxen and his asses, beating them not save when they are idle or at fault, it shall be to them as if they were come to heaven out of hell, and to such goodhap as they have not thought of, save in dreams, for many and many a day. And thus I entreat you to do because ye seem to me to be happy and merciful men, who will not begrudge us this happiness.'

The carles of Burgdale listened eagerly to what he said, and they looked at him with great eyes and marvelled; and their hearts were moved with pity towards him; and Stone-face said:

'Herein, O War-leader, need I give thee no rede, for thou mayst see clearly that all we deem that we should lose our manhood and become the dastards of the Warrior if we did not abide the coming of these poor men, and take them back to the Dale, and cherish them.'

'Yea,' said Wolf of Whitegarth, 'and great thanks we owe to this man that he biddeth us this: for great will be the gain to us if we become so like the Gods that we may deliver the poor from misery. Now must I needs think how they shall wonder when they come to Burgdale and find out how happy it is to dwell there.'

'Surely,' said Face-of-god, 'thus shall we do, whatever cometh of it. But, friend of the wood, as to thralls, there be none such in the Dale, but therein are all men friends and neighbours, and even so shall ye be.'

And he fell a-musing, when he bethought him of how little he had known of sorrow.

But that man, when he beheld the happy faces of the Burgdalers, and hearkened to their

friendly voices, and understood what they said, and he also was become strong with the meat and drink, he bowed his head adown and wept a long while; and they meddled not with him, till he turned again to them and said:

‘Since ye are in arms, and seem to be seeking your foemen, I suppose ye wot that these tyrants and man-quellers will fall upon you in Burgdale ere the summer is well worn.’

‘So much we deem indeed,’ said Face-of-god, ‘but we were fain to hear the certainty of it, and how thou knowest thereof.’

Said the man: ‘It was six moons ago that I fled, as I have told you; and even then it was the common talk amongst our masters that there were fair dales to the south which they would overrun. Man would say to man: We were over many in Silver-dale, and we needed more thralls, because those we had were lessening, and especially the women; now are we more at ease in Rose-dale, though we have sent thralls to Silver-dale; but yet we can bear no more men from thence to eat up our stock from us: let them fare south to the happy dales, and conquer them, and we will go with them and help therein, whether we come back to Rose-dale or no. Such talk did I hear then with mine own ears: but some of those whom I shall bring to you to-morrow shall know better what is doing, since they have fled from Rose-dale but a few days. Moreover, there is a man and a woman who have fled from Silver-dale itself, and are but a month from it, journeying all the time save when they must needs hide; and these say that their masters have got to know the way to Burgdale, and are minded for it before the winter, as I said; and nought else but the ways thither do they desire to know, since they have no fear.’

By then was night come, and though the moon was high in heaven, and lighted all that waste, the Burgdalers must needs light a fire for cooking their meat, whatsoever that woodsman might say; moreover, the night was cold and somewhat frosty. A little before they had come to that place they had shot a fat buck and some smaller deer, but of other meat they had no great store, though there was wine enough. So they lit their fire in the thickest of the thorn-bush to hide it all they might, and thereat they cooked their venison and the trouts which the runaway had taken, and they fell to, and ate and drank and were merry, making much of that poor man till him-seemed he was gotten into the company of the kindest of the Gods.

But when they were full, Face-of-god spake to him, and asked him his name; and he named himself Dallach; but said he: ‘Lord, this is according to the naming of men in Rose-dale before we were enthralled: but now what names have thralls? Also I am not altogether of the blood of them of Rose-dale, but of better and more warrior-like kin.’

Said Face-of-god: ‘Thou hast named Silver-dale; knowest thou it?’

Dallach answered: ‘I have never seen it. It is far hence; in a week’s journey, making all diligence, and not being forced to hide and skulk like those runaways, ye shall come to the mouth thereof lying west, where its rock-walls fall off toward the plain.’

‘But,’ said Face-of-god, ‘is there no other way into that Dale?’

‘Nay, none that folk wot of,’ said Dallach, ‘except to bold cragsmen with their lives in their hands.’

‘Knowest thou aught of the affairs of Silver-dale?’ said Face-of-god.

Said Dallach: ‘Somewhat I know: we wot that but a few years ago there was a valiant folk dwelling therein, who were lords of the whole dale, and that they were vanquished by the Dusky Men: but whether they were all slain and enthralled we wot not; but we deem it otherwise. As for me it is of their blood that I am partly come; for my father’s father came thence to settle in Rose-dale, and wedded a woman of the Dale, who was my father’s mother.’

‘When was it that ye fell under the Dusky Men?’ said Face-of-god.

Said Dallach: ‘It was five years ago. They came into the Dale a great company, all in arms.’

‘Was there battle betwixt you?’ said Face-of-god.

‘Alas! not so,’ said Dallach. ‘We were a happy folk there; but soft and delicate: for the Dale is exceeding fertile, and beareth wealth in abundance, both corn and oil and wine and fruit, and of beasts for man’s service the best that may be. Would that there had been battle, and that I had died therein with those that had a heart to fight; and even so saith now every man, yea, every woman in the Dale. But it was not so when the elders met in our Council-House on the day when the Dusky Men bade us pay them tribute and give them houses to dwell in and lands to live by. Then had we weapons in our hands, but no hearts to use them.’

‘What befell then?’ said the goodman of Whitegarth.

Said Dallach: 'Look ye to it, lords, that it befall not in Burgdale! We gave them all they asked for, and deemed we had much left. What befell, sayst thou? We sat quiet; we went about our work in fear and trembling, for grim and hideous were they to look on. At first they meddled not much with us, save to take from our houses what they would of meat and drink, or raiment, or plenishing. And all this we deemed we might bear, and that we needed no more than to toil a little more each day so as to win somewhat more of wealth. But soon we found that it would not be so; for they had no mind to till the teeming earth or work in the acres we had given them, or to sit at the loom, or hammer in the stithy, or do any manlike work; it was we that must do all that for their behoof, and it was altogether for them that we laboured, and nought for ourselves; and our bodies were only so much our own as they were needful to be kept alive for labour. Herein were our tasks harder than the toil of any mules or asses, save for the younger and goodlier of the women, whom they would keep fair and delicate to be their bed-thralls.

'Yet not even so were our bodies safe from their malice: for these men were not only tyrants, but fools and madmen. Let alone that there were few days without stripes and torments to satiate their fury or their pleasure, so that in all streets and nigh any house might you hear wailing and screaming and groaning; but moreover, though a wise man would not willingly slay his own thrall any more than his own horse or ox, yet did these men so wax in folly and malice, that they would often hew at man or woman as they met them in the way from mere grimness of soul; and if they slew them it was well. Thereof indeed came quarrels enough betwixt master and master, for they are much given to man-slaying amongst themselves: but what profit to us thereof? Nay, if the dead man were a chieftain, then woe betide the thralls! for thereof must many an one be slain on his grave-mound to serve him on the hell-road. To be short: we have heard of men who be fierce, and men who be grim; but these we may scarce believe us to be men at all, but trolls rather; and ill will it be if their race waxeth in the world.'

The Burgdale men hearkened with all their ears, and wondered that such things could befall; and they rejoiced at the work that lay before them, and their hearts rose high at the thought of battle in that behalf, and the fame that should come of it. As for the runaway, they made so much of him that the man marvelled; for they dealt with him like a woman cherishing a son, and knew not how to be kind enough to him.

CHAPTER XXVIII. THE MEN OF BURGDAL MEET THE RUNAWAYS.

Now ere the night was far spent, Dallach arose and said:

'Kind folk, ye will presently be sleeping; but I bid you keep a good watch, and if ye will be ruled by me, ye will kindle no fire on the morrow, for the smoke riseth thick in the morning air, and is as a beacon. As for me, I shall leave you here to rest, and I myself will fare on mine errand.'

They bade him sleep and rest him after so many toils and hardships, saying that they were not tied to an hour to be back in Burgdale; but he said: 'Nay, the moon is high, and it is as good as daylight to me, who could find my way even by starlight; and your tarrying here is nowise safe. Moreover, if I could find those folk and bring them part of the way by night and cloud it were well; for if we were taken again, burning quick would be the best death by which we should die. As for me, now am I strong with meat and drink and hope; and when I come to Burgdale there will be time enough for resting and slumber.'

Said Face-of-god: 'Shall I not wend with thee to see these people and the lairs wherein they hide?'

The man smiled: 'Nay, earl,' said he, 'that shall not be. For wot ye what? If they were to see me in company of a man-at-arms they would deem that I was bringing the foe upon them, and would flee, or mayhappen would fall upon us. For as for me, when I saw thee, thou wert close anigh me, so I knew thee to be no Dusky Man; but they would see the glitter of thine arms from afar, and to them all weaponed men are foemen. Thou, lord, knowest not the heart of a thrall, nor the fear and doubt that is in it. Nay, I myself must cast off these clothes that ye have given me, and fare naked, lest they mistrust me. Only I will take a spear in my hand, and sling a knife round my neck, if ye will give them to me; for if the worst happen, I will not be taken alive.'

Therewith he cast off his raiment, and they gave him the weapons and wished him good speed, and he went his way twixt moonlight and shadow; but the Burgdalers went to sleep when they had set a watch.

Early in the morning they awoke, and the sun was shining and the thrushes singing in the thorn-brake, and all seemed fair and peaceful, and a little haze still hung about the face of the burg over the river. So they went down to the water and washed the night from off them; and thence the most part of them went back to their lair among the thorn-bushes: but four of them went up the dale into the oak-wood to shoot a buck, and five more they sent out to watch their skirts around them; and Face-of-god with old Stone-face went over a ford of the stream, and came on to the lower slope of the burg, and so went up it to the top. Thence they looked about to see if aught were stirring, but they saw little save the waste and the wood, which on the north-east was thick of big trees stretching out a long way. Their own lair was clear to see over its bank and the bushes thereof, and that misliked Face-of-god, lest any foe should climb the burg that day. The morning was clear, and Face-of-god looking north-and-by-west deemed he saw smoke rising into the air over the tree-covered ridges that hid the further distance toward that airt, though further east uphove the black shoulders of the Great that Waste and the snowy peaks behind them. The said smoke was not such as cometh from one great fire, but was like a thin veil staining the pale blue sky, as when men are burning ling on the heath-side and it is seen aloof.

He showed that smoke to Stone-face, who smiled and said:

‘Now will they be lighting the cooking fires in Rose-dale: would I were there with a few hundreds of axes and staves at my back!’

‘Yea,’ said Face-of-god, smiling in his face, ‘but where I pray thee are these elves and woodwights, that we meet them not? Grim things there are in the woods, and things fair enough also: but meseemeth that the trolls and the elves of thy young years have been frightened away.’

Said Stone-face: ‘Maybe, foster-son; that hath been seen ere now, that when one race of man overrunneth the land inhabited by another, the wights and elves that love the vanquished are seen no more, or get them away far off into the outermost wilds, where few men ever come.’

‘Yea,’ said Face-of-god, ‘that may well be. But deemest thou by that token that we shall be vanquished?’

‘As for us, I know not,’ said Stone-face; ‘but thy friends of Shadowy Vale have been vanquished. Moreover, concerning these felons whom now we are hunting, are we all so sure that they be men? Certain it is, that when I go into battle with them, I shall smite with no more pity than my sword, as if I were smiting things that may not feel the woes of man.’

Said Face-of-god: ‘Yea, even so shall it be with me. But what thinkest thou of these runaways? Shall we have tidings of them, or shall Dallach bring the foe upon us? It was for the sake of that question that I have clomb the burg: and that we might watch the land about us.’

‘Nay,’ said Stone-face, ‘I have seen many men, and I deem of Dallach that he is a true man. I deem we shall soon have tidings of his fellows; and they may have seen the elves and woodwights: I would fain ask them thereof, and am eager to see them.’

Said Face-of-god: ‘And I somewhat dread to see them, and their rags and their misery and the weals of their stripes. It irked me to see Dallach when he first fell to his meat last night, how he ate like a dog for fear and famine. How shall it be, moreover, when we have them in the Dale, and they fall to the deed of kind there, as they needs must. Will they not bear us evil and thrall-like men?’

‘Maybe,’ said Stone-face, ‘and maybe not; for they have been thralls but for a little while: and I deem that in no long time shall ye see them much bettered by plenteous meat and rest. And after all is said, this Dallach bore him like a valiant man; also it was valiant of him to flee; and of the others may ye say the like. But look you! there are men going down yonder towards our lair: belike those shall be our guests, and there be no Dusky Men amongst them. Come, let us home!’

So Face-of-god looked and beheld from the height of the burg shapes of men grey and colourless creeping toward the lair from sunshine to shadow, like wild creatures shy and fearful of the hunter, or so he deemed of them.

So he turned away, angry and sad of heart, and the twain went down the burg and across the water to their camp, having seen little to tell of from the height.

When they came to their campment there were their folk standing in a ring round about Dallach and the other runaways. They made way for the War-leader and Stone-face, who came amongst them and beheld the Runaways, that they were many more than they looked to see; for they were of carles one score and three, and of women eighteen, all told save

Dallach. When they saw those twain come through the ring of men and perceived that they were chieftains, some of them fell down on their knees before them and held out their joined hands to them, and kissed the Burgdalers' feet and the hems of their garments, while the tears streamed out of their eyes: some stood moving little and staring before them stupidly: and some kept glancing from face to face of the well-liking happy Burgdale carles, though for a while even their faces were sad and downcast at the sight of the poor men: some also kept murmuring one or two words in their country tongue, and Dallach told Face-of-god that these were crying out for victual.

It must be said of these poor folk that they were of divers conditions, and chiefly of three: and first there were seven of Rose-dale and five of Silver-dale late come to the wood (of these Silver-dalers Dallach had told but of two, for the other three were but just come). Of these twelve were seven women, and all, save two of the women, were clad in one scanty kirtle or shirt only; for such was the wont of the Dusky Men with their thralls. They had brought away weapons, and had amongst them six axes and a spear, and a sword, and five knives, and one man had a shield.

Yet though these were clad and armed, yet in some wise were they the worst of all; they were so timorous and cringing, and most of them heavy-eyed and sullen and down-looking. Many of them had been grievously mishandled: one man had had his left hand smitten off; another was docked of three of his toes, and the gristle of his nose slit up; one was halt, and four had been ear-cropped, nor did any lack weals of whipping. Of the Silver-dale new-comers the three men were the worst of all the Runaways, with wild wandering eyes, but sullen also, and cringing if any drew nigh, and would not look anyone in the face, save presently Face-of-god, on whom they were soon fond to fawn, as a dog on his master. But the women who were with them, and who were well-nigh as timorous as the men, were those two gaily-dad ones, and they were soft-handed and white-skinned, save for the last days of weather in the wood; for they had been bed-thralls of the Dusky Men.

Such were the new-comers to the wood. But others had been, like Dallach, months therein; it may be said that there were eighteen of these, carles and queens together. Little raiment they had amongst them, and some were all but stark naked, so that on these might well be seen as on Dallach the marks of old stripes, and of these also were there men who had been shorn of some member or other, and they were all burnt and blackened by the weather of the woodland; yet for all their nakedness, they bore themselves bolder and more manlike than the later comers, nor did they altogether lack weapons taken from their foemen, and most of them had some edge-tool or another. Of these folk were four from Silver-dale, though Dallach knew it not.

Besides these were a half score and one who had been years in the wood instead of months; weather-beaten indeed were these, shaggy and rough-skinned like wild men of kind. Some of them had made themselves skin breeches or clouts, some went stark naked; of weapons of the Dale had they few, but they bore bows of hazel or wych-elm strung with deer-gut, and shafts headed with flint stones; staves also of the same fashion, and great clubs of oak or holly: some of them also had made them targets of skin and willow-twigs, for these were the warriors of the Runaways: they had a few steel knives amongst them, but had mostly learned the craft of using sharp flints for knives: but four of these were women.

Three of these men were of the kindreds of the Wolf from Silver-dale, and had been in the wood for hard upon ten years, and wild as they were, and without hope of meeting their fellows again, they went proudly and boldly amongst the others, overtopping them by the head and more. For the greater part of these men were somewhat short of stature, though by nature strong and stout of body.

It must be told that though Dallach had thus gotten all these many Runaways together, yet had they not been dwelling together as one folk; for they durst not, lest the Dusky Men should hear thereof and fall upon them, but they had kept themselves as best they could in caves and in brakes three together or two, or even faring alone as Dallach did: only as he was a strong and stout-hearted man, he went to and fro and wandered about more than the others, so that he foregathered with most of them and knew them. He said also that he doubted not but that there were more Runaways in the wood, but these were all he could come at. Divers who had fled had died from time to time, and some had been caught and cruelly slain by their masters. They were none of them old; the oldest, said Dallach, scant of forty winters, though many from their aspect might have been old enough.

So Face-of-god looked and beheld all these poor people; and said to himself, that he might well have dreaded that sight. For here was he brought face to face with the Sorrow of the Earth, whereof he had known nought heretofore, save it might be as a tale in a minstrel's song. And when he thought of the minutes that had made the hours, and the hours that had made the days that these men had passed through, his heart failed him, and he was dumb and might not speak, though he perceived that the men of Burgdale looked for speech from him; but he waved his hand to his folk, and they understood him, for they had heard Dallach say that some of them were crying for victual. So they set to work and dighted for them such meat as they had, and they set them down on the grass and made themselves their carvers and serving-men, and bade them eat what they would of such as there was. Yet, indeed, it grieved the Burgdalers again to note how these folk were driven to eat; for they themselves, though they were merry folk, were exceeding courteous at table, and of great observance of manners: whereas these poor Runaways ate, some of them like hungry dogs, and some hiding their meat as if they feared it should be taken from them, and some cowering over it like falcons, and scarce any with a manlike pleasure in their meal. And, their eating over, the more part of them sat dull and mopish, and as if all things were forgotten for the time present.

Albeit presently Dallach bestirred him and said to Face-of-god: 'Lord of the Earl-folk, if I might give thee rede, it were best to turn your faces to Burgdale without more tarrying. For we are over-nigh to Rose-dale, being but thus many in company. But when we come to our next resting-place, then shall bring thee to speech with the last-comers from Silver-dale; for there they talk with the tongue of the kindreds; but we of Rose-dale for the more part talk otherwise; though in my house it came down from father to son.'

'Yea,' said Face-of-god, gazing still on that unhappy folk, as they sat or lay upon the grass at rest for a little while: but him-seemed as he gazed that some memories of past time stirred in some of them; for some, they hung their heads and the tears stole out of their eyes and rolled down their cheeks. But those older Runaways of Silver-dale were not crouched down like most of the others, but strode up and down like beasts in a den; yet were the tears on the face of one of these. Then Face-of-god constrained himself, and spake to the folk, and said: 'We are now over-nigh to our foes of Rose-dale to lie here any longer, being too few to fall upon them. We will come hither again with a host when we have duly questioned these men who have sought refuge with us: and let us call yonder height the Burg of the Runaways, and it shall be a landmark for us when we are on the road to Rose-dale.'

Then the Burgdalers bade the Runaways courteously and kindly to arise and take the road with them; and by that time were their men all come in; and four of them had venison with them, which was needful, if they were to eat that night or the morrow, as the guests had eaten them to the bone.

So they tarried no more, but set out on the homeward way; and Face-of-god bade Dallach walk beside him, and asked him such concerning Rose-dale and its Dusky Men. Dallach told him that these were not so many as they were masterful, not being above eight hundreds of men, all fighting-men. As to women, they had none of their own race, but lay with the Daleswomen at their will, and begat children of them; and all or most of the said children favoured the race of their begetters. Of the men-children they reared most, but the women-children they slew at once; for they valued not women of their own blood: but besides the women of the Dale, they would go at whiles in bands to the edges of the Plain and beguile wayfarers, and bring back with them thence women to be their bed-thralls; albeit some of these were bought with a price from the Westland men.

As to the number of the folk of Rose-dale, its own folk, he said they would number some five thousand souls, one with another; of whom some thousand might be fit to bear arms if they had the heart thereto, as they had none. Yet being closely questioned, he deemed that they might fall on their masters from behind, if battle were joined.

He said that the folk of Rose-dale had been a goodly folk before they were enthralled, and peaceable with one another, but that now it was a sport of the Dusky Men to set a match between their thralls to fight it out with sword and buckler or otherwise; and the vanquished man, if he were not sore hurt, they would scourge, or shear some member from him, or even slay him outright, if the match between the owners were so made. And many other sad and grievous tales he told to Face-of-god, more than need be told again; so that the War-leader went along sorry and angry, with his teeth set, and his hand on the sword-hilt.

Thus they went till night fell on them, and they could scarce see the signs they had made

on their outward journey. Then they made stay in a little valley, having set a watch duly; and since they were by this time far from Rose-dale, and were a great company as regarded scattered bands of the foe, they lighted their fires and cooked their venison, and made good cheer to the Runaways, and so went to sleep in the wild-wood.

When morning was come they gat them at once to the road; and if the Burgdalers were eager to be out of the wood, their eagerness was as nought to the eagerness of the Runaways, most of whom could not be easy now, and deemed every minute lost unless they were wending on to the Dale; so that this day they were willing to get over the more ground, whereas they had not set out on their road till afternoon yesterday.

Howsoever, they rested at noontide, and Face-of-god bade Dallach bring him to speech with others of the Runaways, and first that he might talk with those three men of the kindreds who had fled from Silver-dale in early days. So Dallach brought them to him; but he found that though they spake the tongue, they were so few-spoken from wildness and loneliness, at least at first, that nought could come from them that was not dragged from them.

These men said that they had been in the wood more than nine years, so that they knew but little of the conditions of the Dale in that present day. However, as to what Dallach had said concerning the Dusky Men, they strengthened his words; and they said that the Dusky Men took no delight save in beholding torments and misery, and that they doubted if they were men or trolls. They said that since they had dwelt in the wood they had slain not a few of the foemen, waylaying them as occasion served, but that in this warfare they had lost two of their fellows. When Face-of-god asked them of their deeming of the numbers of the Dusky Men, they said that before those bands had broken into Rose-dale, they counted them, as far as they could call to mind, at about three thousand men, all warriors; and that somewhat less than one thousand had gone up into Rose-dale, and some had died, and many had been cast away in the wild-wood, their fellows knew not how. Yet had not their numbers in Silver-dale diminished; because two years after they (the speakers) had fled, came three more Dusky Companies or Tribes into Silver-dale, and each of these tribes was of three long hundreds; and with their coming had the cruelty and misery much increased in the Dale, so that the thralls began to die fast; and that drove the Dusky Men beyond the borders of Silver-dale, so that they fell upon Rose-dale. When asked how many of the kindreds might yet be abiding in Silver-dale, their faces clouded, and they seemed exceeding wroth, and answered, that they would willingly hope that most of those that had not been slain at the time of the overthrow were now dead, yet indeed they feared there were yet some alive, and mayhappen not a few women.

By then must they get on foot again, and so the talk fell between them; but when they made stay for the night, after they had done their meat, Face-of-god prayed Dallach bring to him some of the latest-come folk from Silver-dale, and he brought to him the man and the woman who had been in the Dale within that moon. As to the man, if those of the Earl-folk had been few-spoken from fierceness and wildness, he was no less so from mere dulness and weariness of misery; but the woman's tongue went glibly enough, and it seemed to pleasure her to talk about her past miseries. As aforesaid, she was better clad than most of those of Rose-dale, and indeed might be called gaily clad, and where her raiment was befouled or rent, it was from the roughness of the wood and its weather, and not from the thralldom. She was a young and fair woman, black-haired and grey-eyed. She had washed herself that day in a woodland stream which they had crossed on the road, and had arrayed her garments as trimly as she might, and had plucked some fumitory, wherewith she had made a garland for her head. She sat down on the grass in front of Face-of-god, while the man her mate stood leaning against a tree and looked on her greedily. The Burgdale carles drew near to her to hearken her story, and looked kindly on the twain. She smiled on them, but especially on Face-of-god, and said:

‘Thou hast sent for me, lord, and I wot well thou wouldst hear my tale shortly, for it would be long to tell if I were to tell it fully, and bring into it all that I have endured, which has been bitter enough, for all that ye see me smooth of skin and well-liking of body. I have been the bed-thrall of one of the chieftains of the Dusky Men, at whose house many of their great men would assemble, so that ye may ask me whatso ye will; as I have heard much talk and may call it to mind. Now if ye ask me whether I have fled because of the shame that I, a free woman come of free folk, should be a mere thrall in the bed of the foes of my kin, and with no price paid for me, I must needs say it is not so; since over long have we of the Dale been thralls to be ashamed of such a matter. And again, if ye deem that I have fled because I have been burdened with grievous toil and been driven thereto by the whip, ye may look on my hands and my body and ye will see that I have toiled little therewith: nor again did I flee

because I could not endure a few stripes now and again; for such usage do thralls look for, even when they are delicately kept for the sake of the fairness of their bodies, and this they may well endure; yea also, and the mere fear of death by torment now and again. But before me lay death both assured and horrible; so I took mine own counsel, and told none for fear of bewrayal, save him who guarded me; and that was this man; who fled not from fear, but from love of me, and to him I have given all that I might give. So we got out of the house and down the Dale by night and cloud, and hid for one whole day in the Dale itself, where I trembled and feared, so that I deemed I should die of fear; but this man was well pleased with my company, and with the lack of toil and beating even for the day. And in the night again we fled and reached the wild-wood before dawn, and well-nigh fell into the hands of those who were hunting us, and had outgone us the day before, as we lay hid. Well, what is to say? They saw us not, else had we not been here, but scattered piece-meal over the land. This carle knew the passes of the wood, because he had followed his master therein, who was a great hunter in the wastes, contrary to the wont of these men, and he had lain a night on the burg yonder; therefore he brought me thither, because he knew that thereabout was plenty of prey easy to take, and he had a bow with him; and there we fell in with others of our folk who had fled before, and with Dallach; who e'en now told us what was hard to believe, that there was a fair young man like one of the Gods leading a band of goodly warriors, and seeking for us to bring us into a peaceful and happy land; and this man would not have gone with him because he feared that he might fall into thralldom of other folk, who would take me away from him; but for me, I said I would go in any case, for I was weary of the wood and its roughness and toil, and that if I had a new master he would scarcely be worse than my old one was at his best, and him I could endure. So I went, and glad and glad I am, whatever ye will do with me. And now will I answer whatso ye may ask of me.'

She laid her limbs together daintily and looked fondly on Face-of-god, and the carle scowled at her somewhat at first, but presently, as he watched her, his face smoothed itself out of its wrinkles.

But Face-of-god pondered a little while, and then asked the woman if she had heard any words to remember of late days concerning the affairs of the Dusky Men and their intent; and he said:

'I pray thee, sister, be truthful in thine answer, for somewhat lieth on it.'

She said: 'How could I speak aught but the sooth to thee, O lovely lord? The last word spoken hereof I mind me well: for my master had been mishandling me, and I was sullen to him after the smart, and he mocked and jeered me, and said: Ye women deem we cannot do without you, but ye are fools, and know nothing; we are going to conquer a new land where the women are plenty, and far fairer than ye be; and we shall leave you to fare afield like the other thralls, or work in the digging of silver; and belike ye wot what that meaneth. Also he said that they would leave us to the new tribe of their folk, far wilder than they, whom they looked for in the Dale in about a moon's wearing; so that they needs must seek to other lands. Also this same talk would we hear whenever it pleased any of them to mock us their bed-thralls. Now, my sweet lord, this is nought but the very sooth.'

Again spake Face-of-god after a while:

'Tell me, sister, hast thou heard of any of the Dusky Men being slain in the wood?'

'Yea,' she said, and turned pale therewith and caught her breath as one choking; but said in a little while:

'This alone was it hard for me to tell thee amongst all the I griefs I have borne, whereof I might have told thee many tales, and will do one day if thou wilt suffer it; but fear makes this hard for me. For in very sooth this was the cause of my fleeing, that my master was brought in slain by an arrow in the wood; and he was to be borne to bale and burned in three days' wearing; and we three bed-thralls of his, and three of the best of the men-thralls, were to be burned quick on his bale-fire after sore torments; therefore I fled, and hid a knife in my bosom, that I might not be taken alive; but sweet was life to me, and belike I should not have smitten myself.'

And she wept sore for pity of herself before them all. But Face-of-god said:

'Knowest thou, sister, by whom the man was slain?'

'Nay,' she said, still sobbing; 'but I heard nought thereof, nor had I noted it in my terror. The death of others, who were slain before him, and the loss of many, we knew not how, made them more bitterly cruel with us.'

And again was she weeping; but Face-of-god said kindly to her: 'Weep no more, sister, for now shall all thy troubles be over; I feel in my heart that we shall overcome these felons, and make an end of them, and there then is Burgdale for thee in its length and breadth, or thine own Dale to dwell in freely.'

'Nay,' she said, 'never will I go back thither!' and she turned round to him and kissed his feet, and then arose and turned a little toward her mate; and the carle caught her by the hand and led her away, and seemed glad so to do.

So once again they fell asleep in the woods, and again the next morning fared on their way early that they might come into Burgdale before nightfall. When they stayed a while at noontide and ate, Face-of-god again had talk with the Runaways, and this time with those of Rose-dale, and he heard much the same story from them that he had heard before, told in divers ways, till his heart was sick with the hearing of it.

On this last day Face-of-god led his men well athwart the wood, so that he hit Wildlake's Way without coming to Carl-stead; and he came down into the Dale some four hours after noon on a bright day of latter March. At the ingate to the Dale he found watches set, the men whereof told him that the tidings were not right great. Hall-face's company had fallen in with a band of the Felons three score in number in the oak-wood nigh to Boars-bait, and had slain some and chased the rest, since they found it hard to follow them home as they ran for the tangled thicket: of the Burgdalers had two been slain and five hurt in this battle.

As for Red-coat's company, they had fallen in with no foemen.

CHAPTER XXIX. THEY BRING THE RUNAWAYS TO BURGSTEAD.

So now being out of the wood, they went peaceably and safely along the Portway, the Runaways mingling with the Dalesmen. Strange showed amidst the health and wealth of the Dale the rags and misery and nakedness of the thralls, like a dream amidst the trim gaiety of spring; and whomsoever they met, or came up with on the road, whatso his business might be, could not refrain himself from following them, but mingled with the men-at-arms, and asked them of the tidings; and when they heard who these poor people were, even delivered thralls of the Foemen, they were glad at heart and cried out for joy; and many of the women, nay, of the men also, when they first came across that misery from out the heart of their own pleasant life, wept for pity and love of the poor folk, now at last set free, and blessed the swords that should do the like by the whole people.

They went slowly as men began to gather about them; yea, some of the good folk that lived hard by must needs fare home to their houses to fetch cakes and wine for the guests; and they made them sit down and rest on the green grass by the side of the Portway, and eat and drink to cheer their hearts; others, women and young swains, while they rested went down into the meadows and plucked of the spring flowers, and twined them hastily with deft and well-wont fingers into chaplets and garlands for their heads and bodies. Thus indeed they covered their nakedness, till the lowering faces and weather-beaten skins of those hardly-entreated thralls looked grimly out from amidst the knots of cowslip and oxlip, and the branches of the milk-white blackthorn bloom, and the long trumpets of the daffodils, of the hue that wrappeth round the quill which the webster takes in hand when she would pleasure her soul with the sight of the yellow growing upon the dark green web.

So they went on again as the evening was waning, and when they were gotten within a furlong of the Gate, lo! there was come the minstrelsy, the pipe and the tabor, the fiddle and the harp, and the folk that had learned to sing the sweetest, both men and women, and Redesman at the head of them all.

Then fell the throng into an ordered company; first went the music, and then a score of Face-of-god's warriors with drawn swords and uplifted spears; and then the flower-bedecked misery of the Runaways, men and women going together, gaunt, befouled, and hollow-eyed, with here and there a flushed cheek or gleaming eye, or tear-bedewed face, as the joy and triumph of the eve pierced through their wonted weariness of grief; then the rest of the warriors, and lastly the mingled crowd of Dalesfolk, tall men and fair women gaily arrayed, clean-faced, clear-skinned, and sleek-haired, with glancing eyes and ruddy lips.

And now Redesman turned about to the music and drew his bow across his fiddle, and the other bows ran out in concert, and the harps followed the story of them, and he lifted up his voice and sang the words of an old song, and all the singers joined him and blended their voices with his. And these are some of the words which they sang:

Lo! here is Spring, and all we are living,
 We that were wan with Winter's fear;
 Reach out your hands to her hands that are giving,
 Lest ye lose her love and the light of the year.
 Many a morn did we wake to sorrow,
 When low on the land the cloud-wrath lay;
 Many an eve we feared to-morrow,
 The unbegun unfinished day.
 Ah we—we hoped not, and thou wert tardy;
 Nought wert thou helping; nought we prayed.
 Where was the eager heart, the hardy?
 Where was the sweet-voiced unafraid?
 But now thou lovest, now thou ledest,
 Where is gone the grief of our minds?
 What was the word of the tale, that thou heedest
 E'en as the breath of the bygone winds?
 Green and green is thy garment growing
 Over thy blossoming limbs beneath;
 Up o'er our feet rise the blades of thy sowing,
 Pierced are our hearts with thine odorous breath.
 But where art thou wending, thou new-comer?
 Hurrying on to the Courts of the Sun?
 Where art thou now in the House of the Summer?
 Told are thy days and thy deed is done.
 Spring has been here for us that are living
 After the days of Winter's fear;
 Here in our hands is the wealth of her giving,
 The Love of the Earth, and the Light of the Year.

Thus came they to the Gate, and lo! the Bride thereby, leaning against a buttress, gazing with no dull eyes at the coming throng. She was now clad in her woman's attire again, to wit a light flame-coloured gown over a green kirtle; but she yet bore a gilded helm on her head and a sword girt to her side in token of her oath to the God. She had been in Hall-face's company in that last battle, and had done a man's service there, fighting very valiantly, but had not been hurt, and had come back to Burgstead when the shift of men was.

Now she drew herself up and stood a little way before the Gate and looked forth on the throng, and when her eyes beheld the Runaways amidst of the weaponed carles of Burgdale, her face flushed, and her eyes filled with tears as she stood, partly wondering, partly deeming what they were. She waited till Stone-face came by her, and then she took the old man by the sleeve, and drew him apart a little and said to him: 'What meaneth this show, my friend? Who hath clad these folk thus strangely; and who be these three naked tall ones, so fierce-looking, but somewhat noble of aspect?'

For indeed those three men of the kindreds, when they had gotten into the Dale, and had rested them, and drunk a cup of wine, and when they had seen the chaplets and wreaths of the spring-flowers wherewith they were bedecked, and had smelt the sweet savour of them, fell to walking proudly, heeding not their nakedness; for no rag had they upon them save breech-clouts of deer-skin: they had changed weapons with the Burgdale carles; and one had gotten a great axe, which he bore over his shoulder, and the shaft thereof was all done about with copper; and another had shouldered a long heavy thrusting-spear, and the third, an exceeding tall man, bore a long broad-bladed war-sword. Thus they went, brown of skin beneath their flower-garlands, their long hair bleached by the sun falling about their shoulders; high they strode amongst the shuffling carles and tripping women of the later-come thralls. But when they heard the music, and saw that they were coming to the Gate in triumph, strange thoughts of old memories swelled up in their hearts, and they refrained them not from weeping, for they felt that the joy of life had come back to them.

Nor must it be deemed that these were the only ones amongst the Runaways whose hearts were cheered and softened: already were many of them coming back to life, as they felt their worn bodies caressed by the clear soft air of Burgdale, and the sweetness of the flowers that hung about them, and saw all round about the kind and happy faces of their well-willers.

So Stone-face looked on the Bride as she stood with face yet tear-bedewed, awaiting his answer, and said:

'Daughter, thou sayest who clad these folk thus? It was misery that hath so dight them; and they are the images of what we shall be if we love foul life better than fair death, and so fall into the hands of the Felons, who were the masters of these men. As for the tall naked men, they are of our own blood, and kinsmen to Face-of-god's new friends; and they are of

the best of the vanquished: it was in early days that they fled from thralldom; as we may have to do. Now, daughter, I bid thee be as joyous as thou art valiant, and then shall all be well.'

Therewith she smiled on him, and he departed, and she stood a little while, as the throng moved on and was swallowed by the Gate, and looked after them; and for all her pity for the other folk, she thought chiefly of those fearless tall men who were of the blood of those with whom it was lawful to wed.

There she stood as the wind dried the tears upon her cheeks, thinking of the sorrow which these folk had endured, and their stripes and mocking, their squalor and famine; and she wondered and looked on her own fair and shapely hands with the precious finger-rings thereon, and on the dainty cloth and trim broidery of her sleeve; and she touched her smooth cheek with the back of her hand, and smiled, and felt the spring sweet in her mouth, and its savour goodly in her nostrils; and therewith she called to mind the aspect of her lovely body, as whiles she had seen it imaged, all its full measure, in the clear pool at midsummer, or piece-meal, in the shining steel of the Westland mirror. She thought also with what joy she drew the breath of life, yea, even amidst of grief, and of how sweet and pure and well-nurtured she was, and how well beloved of many friends and the whole folk, and she set all this beside those woeful bodies and lowering faces, and felt shame of her sorrow of heart, and the pain it had brought to her; and ever amidst shame and pity of all that misery rose up before her the images of those tall fierce men, and it seemed to her as if she had seen something like to them in some dream or imagination of her mind.

So came the Burgdalers and their guests into the street of Burgstead amidst music and singing; and the throng was great there. Then Face-of-god bade make a ring about the strangers, and they did so, and he and the Runaways alone were in the midst of it; and he spake in a loud voice and said:

'Men of the Dale and the Burg, these folk whom here ye see in such a sorry plight are they whom our deadly foes have rejoiced to torment; let us therefore rejoice to cherish them. Now let those men come forth who deem that they have enough and more, so that they may each take into their houses some two or three of these friends such as would be fain to be together. And since I am War-leader, and have the right hereto, I will first choose them whom I will lead into the House of the Face. And lo you! will I have this man (and he laid his hand on Dallach), who is he whom I first came across, and who found us all these others, and next I will have yonder tall carles, the three of them, because I perceive them to be men meet to be with a War-leader, and to follow him in battle.'

Therewith he drew the three Men of the Wolf towards him, but Dallach already was standing beside him. And folk rejoiced in Face-of-god.

But the Bride came forward next, and spake to him meekly and simply:

'War-leader, let me have of the women those who need me most, that I may bring them to the House of the Steer, and try if there be not some good days yet to be found for them, wherein they shall but remember the past grief as an ugly dream.'

Then Face-of-god looked on her, and him-seemed he had never seen her so fair; and all the shame wherewith he had beheld her of late was gone from him, and his heart ran over with friendly love towards her as she looked into his face with kindly eyes; and he said:

'Kinswoman, take thy choice as thy kindness biddeth, and happy shall they be whom thou choosest.'

She bowed her head soberly, and chose from among the guests four women of the saddest and most grievous, and no man of their kindred spake for going along with them; then she went her ways home, leading one of them by the hand, and strange was it to see those twain going through sun and shade together, that poor wretch along with the goodliest of women.

Then came forward one after other of the worthy goodmen of the Dale, and especially such as were old, and they led away one one man, and another two, and another three, and often would a man crave to go with a woman or a woman with a man, and it was not gainsaid them. So were all the guests apportioned, and ill-content were those goodmen that had to depart without a guest; and one man would say to another: 'Such-an-one, be not downcast; this guest shall be between us, if he will, and shall dwell with thee and me month about; but this first month with me, since I was first comer.' And so forth was it said.

Now to prevent the time to come, it may be said about the Runaways, that when they had been a little while amongst the Burgdalers, well fed and well clad and kindly cherished, it was marvellous how they were bettered in aspect of body, and it began to be seen of them

that they were well-favoured people, and divers of the women exceeding goodly, black-haired and grey-eyed, and very clear-skinned and white-skinned; most of them were young, and the oldest had not seen above forty winters. They of Rose-dale, and especially such as had first fled away to the wood, were very soon seen to be merry and kindly folk; but they who had been longest in captivity, and notably those from Silver-dale who were not of the kindreds, were for a long time sullen and heavy, and it availed little to trust to them for the doing of work; albeit they would follow about their friends of Burgdale with the love of a dog; also they were, divers of them, somewhat thievish, and if they lacked anything would liefer take it by stealth than ask for it; which forsooth the Burgdale men took not amiss, but deemed of it as a jest rather.

Very few of the Runaways had any will to fare back to their old homes, or indeed could be got to go into the wood, or, after a day or two, to say any word of Rose-dale or Silver-dale. In this and other matters the Burgdalers dealt with them as with children who must have their way; for they deemed that their guests had much time to make up; also they were well content when they saw how goodly they were, for these Dalesmen loved to see men goodly of body and of a cheerful countenance.

As for Dallach and the three Silver-dale men of the kindred, they went gladly whereas the Burgdale men would have them; and half a score others took weapons in their hands when the war was foughten: concerning which more hereafter.

But on the even whereof the tale now tells, Face-of-god and Stone-face and their company met after nightfall in the Hall of the Face clad in glorious raiment, and therewith were Dallach and the men of Silver-dale, washen and docked of their long hair, after the fashion of warriors who bear the helm; and they were clad in gay attire, with battle-swords girt to their sides and gold rings on their arms. Somewhat stern and sad-eyed were those Silver-dalers yet, though they looked on those about them kindly and courteously when they met their eyes; and Face-of-god yearned towards them when he called to mind the beauty and wisdom and loving-kindness of the Sun-beam. They were, as aforesaid, strong men and tall, and one of them taller than any amidst that house of tall men. Their names were Wolf-stone, the tallest, and God-swain, and Spear-fist; and God-swain the youngest was of thirty winters, and Wolf-stone of forty. They came into the Hall in such wise, that when they were washed and attired, and all men were assembled in the Hall, and the Alderman and the chieftains sitting on the daïs, Face-of-god brought them in from the out-bower, holding Dallach by the right hand and Wolf-stone by the left; and he looked but a stripling beside that huge man.

And when the men in the Hall beheld such goodly warriors, and remembered their grief late past, they all stood up and shouted for joy of them. But Face-of-god passed up the Hall with them, and stood before the daïs and said:

‘O Alderman of the Dale and Chief of the House of the Face, here I bring to you the foes of our foemen, whom I have met in the Wild-wood, and bidden to our House; and meseemeth they will be our friends, and stand beside us in the day of battle. Therefore I say, take these guests and me together, or put us all to the door together; and if thou wilt take them, then show them to such places as thou deemest meet.’

Then stood up the Alderman and said:

‘Men of Silver-dale and Rose-dale, I bid you welcome! Be ye our friends, and abide here with us as long as seemeth good to you, and share in all that is ours. Son Face-of-god, show these warriors to seats on the daïs beside thee, and cherish them as well as thou knowest how.’

Then Face-of-god brought them up on to the daïs and sat down on the right hand of his father, with Dallach on his right hand, and then Wolf-stone out from him; then sat Stone-face, that there might be a man of the Dale to talk with them and serve them; and on his right hand first Spear-fist and then God-swain. And when they were all sat down, and the meat was on the board, Iron-face turned to his son Face-of-god and took his hand, and said in a loud voice, so that many might hear him:

‘Son Face-of-god, son Gold-mane, thou bearest with thee both ill luck and good. Erewhile, when thou wanderdest out into the Wild-wood, seeking thou knewest not what from out of the Land of Dreams, thou didst but bring aback to us grief and shame; but now that thou hast gone forth with the neighbours seeking thy foemen, thou hast come aback to us with thine hands full of honour and joy for us, and we thank thee for thy gifts, and I call thee a lucky man. Herewith, kinsman, I drink to thee and the lasting of thy luck.’

Therewith he stood up and drank the health of the War-leader and the Guests: and all men

were exceeding joyous thereat, when they called to mind his wrath at the Gate-thing, and they shouted for gladness as they drank that health, and the feast became exceeding merry in the House of the Face; and as to the war to come, it seemed to them as if it were over and done in all triumph.

CHAPTER XXX. HALL-FACE GOETH TOWARD ROSE-DALE.

On the morrow Face-of-god took counsel with Hall-face and Stone-face as to what were best to be done, and they sat on the dais in the Hall to talk it over.

Short was the time that had worn since that day in Shadowy Vale, for it was but eight days since then; yet so many things had befallen in that time, and, to speak shortly, the outlook for the Burgdalers had changed so much, that the time seemed long to all the three, and especially to Face-of-god.

It was yet twenty days till the Great Folk-mote should beholden, and to Hall-face the time seemed long enough to do somewhat, and he deemed it were good to gather force and fall on the Dusky Men in Rose-dale, since now they had gotten men who could lead them the highest way and by the safest passes, and who knew all the ways of the foemen. But to Stone-face this rede seemed not so good; for they would have to go and come back, and fight and conquer, in less time than twenty days, or be belated of the Folk-mote, and meanwhile much might happen.

‘For,’ said Stone-face, ‘we may deem the fighting-men of Rose-dale to be little less than one thousand, and however we fall on them, even if it be unawares at first, they shall fight stubbornly; so that we may not send against them many less than they be, and that shall strip Burgdale of its fighting-men, so that whatever befalls, we that be left shall have to bide at home.’

Now was Face-of-god of the same mind as Stone-face; and he said moreover: ‘When we go to Rose-dale we must abide there a while unless we be overthrown. For if ye conquer it and come away at once, presently shall the tidings come to the ears of the Dusky Men in Silver-dale, and they shall join themselves to those of Rose-dale who have fled before you, and between them they shall destroy the unhappy people therein; for ye cannot take them all away with you: and that shall they do all the more now, when they look to have new thralls in Burgdale, both men and women. And this we may not suffer, but must abide till we have met all our foemen and have overcome them, so that the poor folk there shall be safe from them till they have learned how to defend their dale. Now my rede is, that we send out the War-arrow at once up and down the Dale, and to the Shepherds and Woodlanders, and appoint a day for the Muster and Weapon-show of all our Folk, and that day to be the day before the Spring Market, that is to say, four days before the Great Folk-mote, and meantime that we keep sure watch about the border of the wood, and now and again scour the wood, so as to clear the Dale of their wandering bands.’

‘Yea,’ said Hall-face; ‘and I pray thee, brother, let me have an hundred of men and thy Dallach, and let us go somewhat deep into the wood towards Rose-dale, and see what we may come across; peradventure it might be something better than hart or wild-swine.’

Said Face-of-god: ‘I see no harm therein, if Dallach goeth with thee freely; for I will have no force put on him or any other of the Runaways. Yet meseemeth it were not ill for thee to find the road to Rose-dale; for I have it in my mind to send a company thither to give those Rose-dale man-quellers somewhat to do at home when we fall upon Silver-dale. Therefore go find Dallach, and get thy men together at once; for the sooner thou art gone on thy way the better. But this I bid thee, go no further than three days out, that ye may be back home betimes.’

At this word Hall-face’s eyes gleamed with joy, and he went out from the Hall straightway and sought Dallach, and found him at the Gate. Iron-face had given him a new sword, a good one, and had bidden him call it Thicket-clearer, and he would not leave it any moment of the day or night, but would lay it under his pillow at night as a child does with a new toy; and now he was leaning against a buttress and drawing the said sword half out of the scabbard and poring over its blade, which was indeed fair enough, being wrought with dark grey waving lines like the eddies of the Weltering Water.

So Hall-face greeted him, and smiled and said:

‘Guest, if thou wilt, thou may’st take that new blade of my father’s work which thou lovest so, a journey which shall rejoice it.’

‘Yea,’ said Dallach, ‘I suppose that thou wouldest fare on thy brother’s footsteps, and deemest that I am the man to lead thee on the road, and even farther than he went; and though it might be thought by some that I have seen enough of Rose-dale and the parts thereabout for one while, yet will I go with thee; for now am I a man again, body and soul.’

And therewith he drew Thicket-clearer right out of his sheath and waved him in the air. And Hall-face was glad of him and said he was well apaid of his help. So they went away together to gather men, and on the morrow Hall-face departed and went into the Wild-wood with Dallach and an hundred and two score men.

But as for Face-of-god, he fared up and down the Dale following the War-arrow, and went into all houses, and talked with the folk, both young and old, men and women, and told them closely all that had betid and all that was like to betide; and he was well pleased with that which he saw and heard; for all took his words well, and were nought afeard or dismayed by the tidings; and he saw that they would not hang aback. Meantime the days wore, and Hall-face came not back till the seventh day, and he brought with him twelve more Runaways, of whom five were women. But he had lost four men, and had with him Dallach and five others of the Dalesmen borne upon litters sore hurt; and this was his story:

They got to the Burg of the Runaways on the forenoon of the third day, and thereby came on five carles of the Runaways—men who had missed meeting Dallach that other day, but knew what had been done; for one of them had been sick and could not come with him, and he had told the others: so now they were hanging about the Burg of the Runaways hoping somewhat that he might come again; and they met the Burgdalers full of joy, and brought them trouts that they had caught in the river.

As for the other runaways, namely, five women and two more carles—they had gotten them close to the entrance into Silver-dale, where by night and cloud they came on a campment of the Dusky Men, who were leading home these seven poor wretches, runaways whom they had caught, that they might slay them most evilly in Rose-stead. So Hall-face fell on the Dusky Men, and delivered their captives, but slew not all the foe, and they that fled brought pursuers on them who came up with them the next day, so near was Rose-dale, though they made all diligence homeward. The Burgdalers must needs turn and fight with those pursuers, and at last they drave them aback so that they might go on their ways home. They let not the grass grow beneath their feet thereafter, till they were assured by meeting a band of the Woodlanders, who had gone forth to help them, and with whom they rested a little. But neither so were they quite done with the foemen, who came upon them next day a very many: these however they and the Woodlanders, who were all fresh and unwounded and very valiant, speedily put to the worse; and so they came on to Burgstead, leaving those of them who were sorest hurt to be tended by the Woodlanders at Carlstead, who, as might be looked for, deal with them very lovingly.

It was in the first fight that they suffered that loss of slain and wounded; and therein the newly delivered thralls fought valiantly against their masters: as for Dallach, it was no marvel, said Hall-face, that he was hurt; but rather a marvel that he was not slain, so little he recked of point and edge, if he might but slay the foemen.

Such was Hall-face’s-tale; and Face-of-god deemed that he had done unwisely to let him go that journey; for the slaying of a few Dusky Men was but a light gain to set against the loss of so many Burgdalers; yet was he glad of the deliverance of those Runaways, and deemed it a gain indeed. But henceforth would he hold all still till he should have tidings of Folk-might; so nought was done thereafter save the warding of the Dale, from the country of the Shepherds to the Waste above the Eastern passes.

But Face-of-god himself went up amongst the Shepherds, and abode with a goodman hight Hound-under-Greenbury, who gathered to him the folk from the country-side, and they went up on to Greenbury, and sat on the green grass while he spoke with them and told them, as he had told the others, what had been done and what should be done. And they heard him gladly, and he deemed that there would be no blenching in them, for they were all in one tale to live and die with their friends of Burgdale, and they said that they would have no other word save that to bear to the Great Folk-mote.

So he went away well-pleased, and he fared on thence to the Woodlanders, and gusted at the house of a valiant man hight Wargrove, who on the morrow morn called the folk together to a green lawn of the Wild-wood, so that there was scarce a soul of them that was not there. Then he laid the whole matter before them; and if the Dalesmen had been merry and

ready, and the Shepherds stout-hearted and friendly, yet were the Wood-landers more eager still, so that every hour seemed long to them till they stood in their war-gear; and they told him that now at last was the hour drawing nigh which they had dreamed of, but had scarce dared to hope for, when the lost way should be found, and the crooked made straight, and that which had been broken should be mended; that their meat and drink, and sleeping and waking, and all that they did were now become to them but the means of living till the day was come whereon the two remnants of the children of the Wolf should meet and become one Folk to live or die together.

Then went Face-of-god back to Burgstead again, and as he stood anigh the Thing-stead once more, and looked down on the Dale as he had beheld it last autumn, he bethought him that with all that had been done and all that had been promised, the earth was clearing of her trouble, and that now there was nought betwixt him and the happy days of life which the Dale should give to the dwellers therein, save the gathering hosts of the battle-field and the day when the last word should be spoken and the first stroke smitten. So he went down on to the Portway well content.

Thereafter till the day of the Weapon-show there is nought to tell of, save that Dallach and the other wounded men began to grow whole again; and all men sat at home, or went on the woodland ward, expecting great tidings after the holding of the Folk-mote.

CHAPTER XXXI. OF THE WEAPON-SHOW OF THE MEN OF BURGDAL AND THEIR NEIGHBOURS.

Now on the day appointed for the Weapon-show came the Folk flock-meal to the great and wide meadow that was cleft by Wildlake as it ran to join the Weltering Water. Early in the morning, even before sunrise, had the wains full of women and children begun to come thither. Also there came little horses and asses from the Shepherd country with one or two or three damsels or children sitting on each, and by wain-side or by beast strode the men of the house, merry and fair in their war-gear. The Woodlanders, moreover, man and woman, elder and swain and young damsel, streamed out of the wood from Carlstead, eager to make the day begin before the sunrise, and end before his setting.

Then all men fell to pitching of tents and tilting over of wains; for the April sun was hot in the Dale, and when he arose the meads were gay with more than the spring flowers; for the tents and the tilts were stained and brodered with many colours, and there was none who had not furbished up his war-gear so that all shone and glittered. And many wore gay surcoats over their armour, and the women were clad in all their bravery, and the Houses mostly of a suit; for one bore blue and another corn-colour, and another green, and another brazil, and so forth, and all gleaming and glowing with broderie of gold and bright hues. But the women of the Shepherds were all clad in white, embroidered with green boughs and red blossoms, and the Woodland women wore dark red kirtles. Moreover, the women had set garlands of flowers on their heads and the helms of the men, and for the most part they were slim of body and tall and light-limbed, and as dainty to look upon as the willow-boughs that waved on the brook-side.

Thither had the goodmen who were guesting the Runaways brought their guests, even now much bettered by their new soft days; and much the poor folk marvelled at all this joyance, and they scarce knew where they were; but to some it brought back to their minds days of joyance before the thralldom and all that they had lost, so that their hearts were heavy a while, till they saw the warriors of the kindreds streaming into the mead and bethought them why they carried steel.

Now by then the sun was fully up there was a great throng on the Portway, and this was the folk of the Burg on their way to the Weapon-mead. The men-at-arms were in the midst of the throng, and at the head of them was the War-leader, with the banner of the Face before him, wherein was done the image of the God with the ray-ringed head. But at the rearward of the warriors went the Alderman and the Burg-wardens, before whom was borne the banner of the Burg pictured with the Gate and its Towers; but in the midst betwixt those two was the banner of the Steer, a white beast on a green field.

So when the Dale-wardens who were down in the meadow heard the music and beheld who were coming, they bade the companies of the Dale and the Shepherds and the Woodlanders who were down there to pitch their banners in a half circle about the ingle of the meadow which was made by the streams of Wildlake and the Weltering Water, and gather to them to

be ordered there under their leaders of scores and half-hundreds and hundreds; and even so they did. But the banners of the Dale without the Burg were the Bridge, and the Bull, and the Vine, and the Sickle. And the Shepherds had three banners, to wit Greenbury, and the Fleece, and the Thorn.

As for the Woodlanders, they said that they were abiding their great banner, but it should come in good time; 'and meantime,' said they, 'here are the war-tokens that we shall fight under; for they are good enough banners for us poor men, the remnant of the valiant of time past.' Therewith they showed two great spears, and athwart the one was tied an arrow, its point dipped in blood, its feathers singed with fire; and they said, 'This is the banner of the War-shaft.'

On the other spear there was nought; but the head thereof was great and long, and they had so burnished the steel that the sun smote out a ray of light from it, so that it might be seen from afar. And they said: 'This is the Banner of the Spear! Down yonder where the ravens are gathering ye shall see a banner flying over us. There shall fall many a mother's son.'

Smiled the Dale-wardens, and said that these were good banners to fight under; and those that stood nearby shouted for the valiancy of the Woodland Carles.

Now the Dale-wardens went to the entrance from the Portway to the meadow, and there met the Men of the Burg, and two of them went one on either side of the War-leader to show him to his seat, and the others abode till the Alderman and Burg-wardens came up, and then joined themselves to them, and the horns blew up both in the meadow and on the road, and the new-comers went their ways to their appointed places amidst the shouts of the Dalesmen; and the women and children and old men from the Burg followed after, till all the mead was covered with bright raiment and glittering gear, save within the ring of men at the further end.

So came the War-leader to his seat of green turf raised in the ingle aforesaid; and he stood beside it till the Alderman and Wardens had taken their places on a seat behind him raised higher than his; below him on the step of his seat sat the Scrivener with his pen and ink-horn and scroll of parchment, and men had brought him a smooth shield whereon to write.

On the left side of Face-of-god stood the men of the Face all glittering in their arms, and amongst them were Wolf-stone and his two fellows, but Dallach was not yet whole of his hurts. On his right were the folk of the House of the Steer: the leader of that House was an old white-bearded man, grandfather of the Bride, for her father was dead; and who but the Bride herself stood beside him in her glorious war-gear, looking as if she were new come from the City of the Gods, thought most men; but those who beheld her closely deemed that she looked heavy-eyed and haggard, as if she were aweary. Nevertheless, wheresoever she passed, and whosoever looked on her (and all men looked on her), there arose a murmur of praise and love; and the women, and especially the young ones, said how fair her deed was, and how meet she was for it; and some of them were for doing on war-gear and faring to battle with the carles; and of these some were sober and solemn, as was well seen afterwards, and some spake lightly: some also fell to boasting of how they could run and climb and swim and shoot in the bow, and fell to baring of their arms to show how strong they were: and indeed they were no weaklings, though their arms were fair.

There then stood the ring of men, each company under its banner; and beyond them stood the women and children and men unmeet for battle; and beyond them again the tilted wains and the tents.

Now Face-of-god sat him down on the turf-seat with his bright helm on his head and his naked sword across his knees, while the horns blew up loudly, and when they had done, the elder of the Dale-wardens cried out for silence. Then again arose Face-of-god and said:

'Men of the Dale, and ye friends of the Shepherds, and ye, O valiant Woodlanders; we are not assembled here to take counsel, for in three days' time shall the Great Folk-mote be holden, whereat shall be counsel enough. But since I have been appointed your Chief and War-leader, till such time as the Folk-mote shall either yeasay or naysay my leadership, I have sent for you that we may look each other in the face and number our host and behold our weapons, and see if we be meet for battle and for the dealing with a great host of foemen. For now no longer can it be said that we are going to war, but rather that war is on our borders, and we are blended with it; as many have learned to their cost; for some have been slain and some sorely hurt. Therefore I bid you now, all ye that are weaponed, wend past us that the tale of you may be taken. But first let every hundred-leader and half-hundred-leader and score-leader make

sure that he hath his tale aright, and give his word to the captain of his banner that he in turn may give it out to the Scrivener with his name and the House and Company that he leadeth.'

So he spake and sat him adown; and the horns blew again in token that the companies should go past; and the first that came was Hall-ward of the House of the Steer, and the first of those that went after him was the Bride, going as if she were his son.

So he cried out his name, and the name of his House, and said, 'An hundred and a half,' and passed forth, his men following him in most goodly array. Each man was girt with a good sword and bore a long heavy spear over his shoulder, save a score who bare bows; and no man lacked a helm, a shield, and a coat of fence.

Then came a goodly man of thirty winters, and stayed before the Scrivener and cried out:

'Write down the House of the Bridge of the Upper Dale at one hundred, and War-well their leader.'

And he strode on, and his men followed clad and weaponed like those of the Steer, save that some had axes hanging to their girdles instead of swords; and most bore casting-spears instead of the long spears, and half a score were bowmen.

Then came Fox of Upton leading the men of the Bull of Middale, an hundred and a half lacking two; very great and tall were his men, and they also bore long spears, and one score and two were bowmen.

Then Fork-beard of Lea, a man well on in years, led on the men of the Vine, an hundred and a half and five men thereto; two score of them bare bow in hand and were girt with sword; the rest bore their swords naked in their right hands, and their shields (which were but small bucklers) hanging at their backs, and in the left hand each bore two casting-spears. With these went two doughty women-at-arms among the bowmen, tall and well-knit, already growing brown with the spring sun, for their work lay among the stocks of the vines on the southward-looking bents.

Next came a tall young man, yellow-haired, with a thin red beard, and gave himself out for Red-beard of the Knolls; he bore his father's name, as the custom of their house was, but the old man, who had long been head man of the House of the Sickel, was late dead in his bed, and the young man had not seen twenty winters. He bade the Scrivener write the tale of the Men of the Sickel at an hundred and a half, and his folk fared past the War-leader joyously, being one half of them bowmen; and fell shooters they were; the other half were girt with swords, and bore withal long ashen staves armed with great blades curved inwards, which weapon they called heft-sax.

All these bands, as the name and the tale of them was declared were greeted with loud shouts from their fellows and the bystanders; but now arose a greater shout still, as Stone-face, clad in goodly glittering array, came forth and said:

'I am Stone-face of the House of the Face, and I bring with me two hundreds of men with their best war-gear and weapons: write it down, Scrivener!'

And he strode on like a young man after those who had gone past, and after him came the tall Hall-face and his men, a gallant sight to see: two score bowmen girt with swords, and the others with naked swords waving aloft, and each bearing two casting-spears in his left hand.

Then came a man of middle age, broad-shouldered, yellow-haired, blue-eyed, of wide and ruddy countenance, and after him a goodly company; and again great was the shout that went up to the heavens; for he said:

'Scrivener, write down that Hound-under-Greenbury, from amongst the dwellers in the hills where the sheep feed, leadeth the men who go under the banner of Greenbury, to the tale of an hundred and four score.'

Therewith he passed on, and his men followed, stout, stark, and merry-faced, girt with swords, and bearing over their shoulders long-staved axes, and spears not so long as those which the Dalesmen bore; and they had but a half score of arrow-shot with them.

Next came a young man, blue-eyed also, with hair the colour of flax on the distaff, broad-faced and short-nosed, low of stature, but very strong-built, who cried out in a loud, cheerful voice:

'I am Strongitharm of the Shepherds, and these valiant men are of the Fleece and the Thorn blended together, for so they would have it; and their tale is one hundred and two score and ten.'

Then the men of those kindreds went past merry and shouting, and they were clad and

weaponed like to them of Greenbury, but had with them a score of bowmen. And all these Shepherd-folk wore over their hauberks white woollen surcoats broidered with green and red.

Now again uprose the cry, and there stood before the War-leader a very tall man of fifty winters, dark-faced and grey-eyed, and he spake slowly and somewhat softly, and said:

‘War-leader, this is Red-wolf of the Woodlanders leading the men who go under the sign of the War-shaft, to the number of an hundred and two.’

Then he passed on, and his men after him, tall, lean, and silent amidst the shouting. All these men bare bows, for they were keen hunters; each had at his girdle a little axe and a wood-knife, and some had long swords withal. They wore, everyone of the carles, short green surcoats over their coats of fence; but amongst them were three women who bore like weapons to the men, but were clad in red kirtles under their hauberks, which were of good ring-mail gleaming over them from throat to knee.

Last came another tall man, but young, of twenty-five winters, and spake:

‘Scrivener, I am Bears-bane of the Woodlanders, and these that come after me wend under the sign of the Spear, and they are of the tale of one hundred and seven.’

And he passed by at once, and his men followed him, clad and weaponed no otherwise than they of the War-shaft, and with them were two women.

Now went all those companies back to their banners, and stood there; and there arose among the bystanders much talk concerning the Weapon-show, and who were the best arrayed of the Houses. And of the old men, some spake of past weapon-shows which they had seen in their youth, and they set them beside this one, and praised and blamed. So it went on a little while till the horns blew again, and once more there was silence. Then arose Face-of-god and said:

‘Men of Burgdale, and ye Shepherd-folk, and ye of the Woodland, now shall ye wot how many weaponed men we may bring together for this war. Scrivener, arise and give forth the tale of the companies, as they have been told unto you.’

Then the Scrivener stood up on the turf-bench beside Face-of-god, and spake in a loud voice, reading from his scroll:

‘Of the Men of Burgdale there have passed by me nine hundreds and six; of the Shepherds three hundreds and eight and ten; and of the Woodlanders two hundreds and nine; so that all told our men are fourteen hundreds and thirty and three.’

Now in those days men reckoned by long hundreds, so that the whole tale of the host was one thousand, five hundred, and four score and one, telling the tale in short hundreds.

When the tale had been given forth and heard, men shouted again, and they rejoiced that they were so many. For it exceeded the reckoning which the Alderman had given out at the Gate-thing. But Face-of-god said:

‘Neighbours, we have held our Weapon-show; but now hold you ready, each man, for the Hosting toward very battle; for belike within seven days shall the leaders of hundreds and twenties summon you to be ready in arms to take whatso fortune may befall. Now is Sundered the Weapon-show. Be ye as merry to-day as your hearts bid you to be.’

Therewith he came down from his seat with the Alderman and the Wardens, and they mingled with the good folk of the Dale and the Shepherds and the Woodlanders, and merry was their converse there. It yet lacked an hour of noon; so presently they fell to and feasted in the green meadow, drinking from wain to wain and from tent to tent; and thereafter they played and sported in the meads, shooting at the butts and wrestling, and trying other masteries. Then they fell to dancing one and all, and so at last to supper on the green grass in great merriment. Nor might you have known from the demeanour of any that any threat of evil overhung the Dale. Nay, so glad were they, and so friendly, that you might rather have deemed that this was the land whereof tales tell, wherein people die not, but live for ever, without growing any older than when they first come thither, unless they be born into the land itself, and then they grow into fair manhood, and so abide. In sooth, both the land and the folk were fair enough to be that land and the folk thereof.

But a little after sunset they Sundered, and some fared home; but many of them abode in the tents and tilted wains, because the morrow was the first day of the Spring Market: and already were some of the Westland chapmen come; yea, two of them were with the bystanders in the meadow; and more were looked for ere the night was far spent.

CHAPTER XXXII. THE MEN OF SHADOWY VALE COME TO THE SPRING MARKET AT BURGSTEAD.

On the morrow betimes in the morning the Westland chapmen, who were now all come, went out from the House of the Face, where they were ever wont to be lodged, and set up their booths adown the street betwixt gate and bridge. Gay was the show; for the booths were tilted over with painted cloths, and the merchants themselves were clad in long gowns of fine cloth; scarlet, and blue, and white, and green, and black, with broidered welts of gold and silver; and their knaves were gaily attired in short coats of divers hues, with silver rings about their arms, and short swords girt to their sides. People began to gather about these chapmen at once when they fell to opening their bales and their packs, and unloading their wains. There had they iron, both in pigs and forged scrap and nails; steel they had, and silver, both in ingots and vessel; pearls from over sea; cinnabar and other colours for staining, such as were not in the mountains: madder from the marshes, and purple of the sea, and scarlet grain from the holm-oaks by its edge, and woad from the deep clayey fields of the plain; silken thread also from the outer ocean, and rare webs of silk, and jars of olive oil, and fine pottery, and scented woods, and sugar of the cane. But gold they had none with them, for that they took there; and for weapons, save a few silver-gilt toys, they had no market.

So presently they fell to chaffer; for the carles brought them little bags of the river-borne gold, so that the weights and scales were at work; others had with them scrolls and tallies to tell the number of the beasts which they had to sell, and the chapmen gave them wares therefor without beholding the beasts; for they wotted that the Dalesmen lied not in chaffer. While the day was yet young withal came the Dalesmen from the mid and nether Dale with their wares and set up their booths; and they had with them flasks and kegs of the wine which they had to sell; and bales of the good winter-woven cloth, some grey, some dyed, and pieces of fine linen; and blades of swords, and knives, and axes of such fashion as the Westland men used; and golden cups and chains, and fair rings set with mountain-blue stones, and copper bowls, and vessels gilt and parcel-gilt, and mountain-blue for staining. There were men of the Shepherds also with such fleeces as they could spare from the daily chaffer with the neighbours. And of the Woodlanders were four carles and a woman with peltries and dressed deer-skins, and a few pieces of well-carven wood-work for bedsteads and chairs and such like.

Soon was the Burg thronged with folk in all its open places, and all were eager and merry, and it could not have been told from their demeanour and countenance that the shadow of a grievous trouble hung over them. True it was that every man of the Dale and the neighbours was girt with his sword, or bore spear or axe or other weapon in his hand, and that most had their bucklers at their backs and their helms on their heads; but this was ever their custom at all meetings of men, not because they dreaded war or were fain of strife, but in token that they were free men, from whom none should take the weapons without battle.

Such were the folk of the land: as for the chapmen, they were well-spoken and courteous, and blithe with the folk, as they well might be, for they had good pennyworths of them; yet they dealt with them without using measureless lying, as behoved folk dealing with simple and proud people; and many was the tale they told of the tidings of the Cities and the Plain.

There amongst the throng was the Bride in her maiden's attire, but girt with the sword, going from booth to booth with her guests of the Runaways, and doing those poor people what pleasure she might, and giving them gifts from the goods there, such as they set their hearts on. And the more part of the Runaways were about among the people of the Fair; but Dallach, being still weak, sat on a bench by the door of the House of the Face looking on well-pleased at all the stir of folk.

Hall-face was gone on the woodland ward; while Face-of-god went among the folk in his most glorious attire; but he soon betook him to the place of meeting without the Gate, where Stone-face and some of the elders were sitting along with the Alderman, beside whom sat the head man of the merchants, clad in a gown of fine scarlet embroidered with the best work of the Dale, with a golden chaplet on his head, and a good sword, golden-hilted, by his side, all which the Alderman had given to it him that morning. These chiefs were talking together concerning the tidings of the Plain, and many a tale the guest told to the Dalesmen, some true, some false. For there had been battles down there, and the fall of kings, and destruction of people, as oft befalleth in the guileful Cities. He told them also, in answer to their story of the Dusky Men, of how men even such-like, but riding on horses, or drawn in wains, an host not to be numbered, had erewhile overthrown the hosts of the Cities of the Plain, and had

wrought evils scarce to be told of; and how they had piled up the skulls of slaughtered folk into great hills beside the city-gates, so that the sun might no longer shine into the streets; and how because of the death and the rapine, grass had grown in the kings' chambers, and the wolves had chased deer in the Temples of the Gods.

'But,' quoth he, 'I know you, bold tillers of the soil, valiant scourers of the Wild-wood, that the worst that can befall you will be to die under shield, and that ye shall suffer no torment of the thrall. May the undying Gods bless the threshold of this Gate, and oft may I come hither to taste of your kindness! May your race, the uncorrupt, increase and multiply, till your valiant men and clean maidens make the bitter sweet and purify the earth!'

He spake smooth-tongued and smiling, handling the while the folds of his fine scarlet gown, and belike he meant a full half of what he said; for he was a man very eloquent of speech, and had spoken with kings, uncowed and pleased with his speaking; and for that cause and his riches had he been made chief of the chapmen. As he spake the heart of Face-of-god swelled within him, and his cheek flushed; but Iron-face sat up straight and proud, and a light smile played about his face, as he said gravely:

'Friend of the Westland, I thank thee for the blessing and the kind word. Such as we are, we are; nor do I deem that the very Gods shall change us. And if they will be our friends, it is well; for we desire nought of them save their friendship; and if they will be our foes, that also shall we bear; nor will we curse them for doing that which their lives bid them to do. What sayest thou, Face-of-god, my son?'

'Yea, father,' said Face-of-god, 'I say that the very Gods, though they slay me, cannot unmake my life that has been. If they do deeds, yet shall we also do.'

The Outlander smiled as they spake, and bowed his head to Iron-face and Face-of-god, and wondered at their pride of heart, marvelling what they would say to the great men of the Cities if they should meet them.

But as they sat a-talking, there came two men running to them from the Portway, their weapons all clattering upon them, and they heard withal the sound of a horn winded not far off very loud and clear; and the Chapman's cheek paled: for in sooth he doubted that war was at hand, after all he had heard of the Dalesmen's dealings with the Dusky Men. And all battle was loathsome to him, nor for all the gain of his chaffer had he come into the Dale, had he known that war was looked for.

But the chiefs of the Dalesmen stirred not, nor changed countenance; and some of the goodmen who were in the street nigh the Gate came forth to see what was toward; for they also had heard the voice of the horn.

Then one of those messengers came up breathless, and stood before the chiefs, and said:

'New tidings, Alderman; here be weaponed strangers come into the Dale.'

The Alderman smiled on him and said: 'Yea, son, and are they a great host of men?'

'Nay,' said the man, 'not above a score as I deem, and there is a woman with them.'

'Then shall we abide them here,' said the Alderman, 'and thou mightest have saved thy breath, and suffered them to bring tidings of themselves; since they may scarce bring us war. For no man desireth certain and present death; and that is all that such a band may win at our hands in battle to-day; and all who come in peace are welcome to us. What like are they to behold?'

Said the man: 'They are tall men gloriously attired, so that they seem like kinsmen of the Gods; and they bear flowering boughs in their hands.'

The Alderman laughed, and said: 'If they be Gods they are welcome indeed; and they shall grow the wiser for their coming; for they shall learn how guest-fain the Burgdale men may be. But if, as I deem, they be like unto us, and but the children of the Gods, then are they as welcome, and it may be more so, and our greeting to them shall be as their greeting to us would be.'

Even as he spake the horn was winded nearer yet, and more loudly, and folk came pouring out of the Gate to learn the tidings. Presently the strangers came from off the Portway into the space before the Gate; and their leader was a tall and goodly man of some thirty winters, in glorious array, helm on head and sword by side, his surcoat green and flowery like the spring meads. In his right hand he held a branch of the blossomed black-thorn (for some was yet in blossom), and his left had hold of the hand of an exceeding fair woman who went beside him: behind him was a score of weaponed men in goodly attire, some bearing bows, some

long spears, but each bearing a flowering bough in hand.

The tall man stopped in the midst of the space, and the Alderman and they with him stirred not; though, as for Face-of-god, it was to him as if summer had come suddenly into the midst of winter, and for the very sweetness of delight his face grew pale.

Then the new-comer drew nigh to the Alderman and said:

‘Hail to the Gate and the men of the Gate! Hail to the kindred of the children of the Gods!’

But the Alderman stood up and spake: ‘And hail to thee, tall man! Fair greeting to thee and thy company! Wilt thou name thyself with thine own name, or shall I call thee nought save Guest? Welcome art thou, by whatsoever name thou wilt be called. Here may’st thou and thy folk abide as long as ye will.’

Said the new-comer: ‘Thanks have thou for thy greeting and for thy bidding! And that bidding shall we take, whatsoever may come of it; for we are minded to abide with thee for a while. But know thou, O Alderman of the Dalesmen, that I am not sackless toward thee and thine. My name is Folk-might of the Children of the Wolf, and this woman is the Sun-beam, my sister, and these behind me are of my kindred, and are well beloved and trusty. We are no evil men or wrong-doers; yet have we been driven into sore straits, wherein men must needs at whiles do deeds that make their friends few and their foes many. So it may be that I am thy foeman. Yet, if thou doubttest of me that I shall be a baneful guest, thou shalt have our weapons of us, and then mayest thou do thy will upon us without dread; and here first of all is my sword!’

Therewith he cast down the flowering branch he was bearing, and pulled his sword from out his sheath, and took it by the point, and held out the hilt to Iron-face.

But the Alderman smiled kindly on him and said:

‘The blade is a good one, and I say it who know the craft of sword-forging; but I need it not, for thou seest I have a sword by my side. Keep your weapons, one and all; for ye have come amongst many and those no weaklings: and if so be that thy guilt against us is so great that we must needs fall on you, ye will need all your war-gear. But hereof is no need to speak till the time of the Folk-mote, which will be holden in three days’ wearing; so let us forbear this matter till then; for I deem we shall have enough to say of other matters. Now, Folk-might, sit down beside me, and thou also, Sun-beam, fairest of women.’

Therewith he looked into her face and reddened, and said:

‘Yet belike thou hast a word of greeting for my son, Face-of-god, unless it be so that ye have not seen him before?’

Then Face-of-god came forward, and took Folk-might by the hand and kissed him; and he stood before the Sun-beam and took her hand, and the world waxed a wonder to him as he kissed her cheeks; and in no wise did she change countenance, save that her eyes softened, and she gazed at him full kindly from the happiness of her soul.

Then Face-of-god said: ‘Welcome, Guests, who erewhile guested me so well: now beginneth the day of your well-doing to the men of Burgdale; therefore will we do to you as well as we may.’

Then Folk-might and the Sun-beam sat them down with the chieftains, one on either side of the Alderman, but Face-of-god passed forth to the others, and greeted them one by one: of them was Wood-father and his three sons, and Bow-may; and they rejoiced exceedingly to see him, and Bow-may said:

‘Now it gladdens my heart to look upon thee alive and thriving, and to remember that day last winter when I met thee on the snow, and turned thee back from the perilous path to thy pleasure, which the Dusky Men were besetting, of whom thou knewest nought. Yea, it was merry that tide; but this is better. Nay, friend,’ she said, ‘it availeth thee nought to strive to look out of the back of thine head: let it be enough to thee that she is there. Thou art now become a great chieftain, and she is no less; and this is a meeting of chieftains, and the folk are looking on and expecting demeanour of them as of the Gods; and she is not to be dealt with as if she were the daughter of some little goodman with whom one hath made tryst in the meadows. There! hearken to me for a while; at least till I tell thee that thou seemest to me to hold thine head higher than when last I saw thee; though that is no long time either. Hast thou been in battle again since that day?’

‘Nay,’ he said, ‘I have stricken no stroke since I slew two felons within the same hour that we parted. And thou, sister, what hast thou done?’

She said: 'The grey goose hath been on the wing thrice since that, bearing on it the bane of evil things.'

Then said Wood-wise: 'Kinswoman, tell him of that battle, since thou art deft with thy tongue.'

She said: 'Weary on battles! it is nought save this: twelve days ago needs must every fighting-man of the Wolf, carle or of queen, wend away from Shadowy Vale, while those unmeet for battle we hid away in the caves at the nether end of the Dale: but Sun-beam would not endure that night, and fared with us, though she handled no weapon. All this we had to do because we had learned that a great company of the Dusky Men were over-nigh to our Dale, and needs must we fall upon them, lest they should learn too much, and spread the story. Well, so wise was Folk-might that we came on them unawares by night and cloud at the edge of the Pine-wood, and but one of our men was slain, and of them not one escaped; and when the fight was over we counted four score and ten of their arm-rings.'

He said: 'Did that or aught else come of our meeting with them that morning?'

'Nay,' she said, 'nought came of it: those we slew were but a straying band. Nay, the four score and ten slain in the Pine-wood knew not of Shadowy Vale belike, and had no intent for it: they were but scouring the wood seeking their warriors that had gone out from Silver-dale and came not aback.'

'Thou art wise in war, Bow-may,' said Face-of-god, and he smiled withal.

Bow-may reddened and said: 'Friend Gold-mane, dost thou perchance deem that there is aught ill in my warring? And the Sun-beam, she naysayeth the bearing of weapons; though I deem that she hath little fear of them when they come her way.'

Said Face-of-god: 'Nay, I deem no ill of it, but much good. For I suppose that thou hast learned overmuch of the wont of the Dusky Men, and hast seen their thralls?'

She knitted her brows, and all the merriment went out of her face at that word, and she answered: 'Yea, thou hast it; for I have both seen their thralls and been in the Dale of thralldom; and how then can I do less than I do? But for thee, I perceive that thou hast been nigh unto our foes and hast fallen in with their thralls; and that is well; for whatso tales we had told thee thereof it is like thou wouldst not have trowed in, as now thou must do, since thou thyself hast seen these poor folk. But now I will tell thee, Gold-mane, that my soul is sick of these comings and goings for the slaughter of a few wretches; and I long for the Great Day of Battle, when it will be seen whether we shall live or die; and though I laugh and jest, yet doth the wearing of the days wear me.'

He looked kindly on her and said: 'I am War-leader of this Folk, and trust me that the waiting-tide shall not be long; wherefore now, sister, be merry to-day, for that is but meet and right; and cast aside thy care, for presently shalt thou behold many new friends. But now meseemeth overlong have ye been standing before our Gate, and it is time that ye should see the inside of our Burg and the inside of our House.'

Indeed by this time so many men had come out of the street that the place before the Gate was all thronged, and from where he stood Face-of-god could scarce see his father, or Folk-might and the Sun-beam and the chieftains.

So he took Wood-father by the hand, and close behind him came Wood-wise and Bow-may, and he cried out for way that he might speak with the Alderman, and men gave way to them, and he led those new-comers close up to the gate-seats of the Elders, and as he clove the press smiling and bright-eyed and happy, all gazed on him; but the Sun-beam, who was sitting between Iron-face and the Westland Chapman, and who heretofore had been agaze with eyes beholding little, past whose ears the words went unheard, and whose mind wandered into thoughts of things unfashioned yet, when she beheld him close to her again, then, taken unawares, her eyes caressed him, and she turned as red as a rose, as she felt all the sweetness of desire go forth from her to meet him. So that, he perceiving it, his voice was the clearer and sweeter for the inward joy he felt, as he said:

'Alderman, meseemeth it is now time that we bring our Guests into the House of our Fathers; for since they are in warlike array, and we are no longer living in peace, and I am now War-leader of the Dale, I deem it but meet that I should have the guesting of them. Moreover, when we are come into our House, I will bid thee look into thy treasury, that thou may'st find therein somewhat which it may pleasure us to give to our Guests.'

Said Iron-face: 'Thou sayest well, son, and since the day is now worn past noon, and these

folk are but just come from the Waste, therefore such as we have of meat and drink abide them. And surely there is within our house a coffer which belongeth to thee and me; and forsooth I know not why we keep the treasures hoarded therein, save that it be for this cause: that if we were to give to our friends that which we ourselves use and love, which would be of all things pleasant to us, if we gave them such goods, they would be worn and worsened by our use of them. For this reason, therefore, do we keep fair things which we use not, so that we may give them to our friends.

‘Now, Guests, both of the Waste and the Westland, since here is no Gate-thing or meeting of the Dale-wardens, and we sit here but for our pleasure, let us go take our pleasure within doors for a while, if it seem good to you.’

Therewith he arose, and the folk made way for him and his Guests; and Folk-might went on the right hand of Iron-face, and beside him went the Chapman, who looked on him with a half-smile, as though he knew somewhat of him. But on the other side of Iron-face went the Sun-beam, whose hand he held, and after these came Face-of-god, leading in the rest of the New-comers, who yet held the flowery branches in their hands.

Now so much had Face-of-god told the Dalesmen, that they deemed they all knew these men for their battle-fellows of whom they had heard tell; and this the more as the men were so goodly and manly of aspect, especially Folk-might, so that they seemed as if they were nigh akin to the Gods. As for the Sun-beam, they knew not how to praise her beauty enough, but they said that they had never known before how fair the Gods might be. So they raised a great shout of welcome as the men came through the Gate into the Burg, and all men turned their backs on the booths, so eager were they to behold closely these new friends.

But as the Guests went from the Gate to the House of the Face, going very slowly because of the press, there in the front of the throng stood the Bride with the women of the Runaways, whom she had caused to be clad very fairly; and she was fain to do them a pleasure by bringing them to sight of these new-comers, of whom she had not heard who they were, though she had heard the cry that strangers were at hand. So there she stood smiling a little with the pleasure of showing a fair sight to the poor people, as folk do with children. But when she saw those twain going on each side of the Alderman she knew them at once; and when the Sun-beam, who was on his left side, passed so close to her that she could see the very smoothness and dainty fashion of her skin, then was she astonished, and the world seemed strange to her, and till they were gone by, and for a while afterwards, she knew not where she was nor what she did, though it seemed to her as if she still saw the face of that fair woman as in a picture.

But the Sun-beam had noted her at first, even amongst the fair women of Burgstead, and she so steady and bright beside the wandering timorous eyes and lowering faces of the thralls. But suddenly, as eye met eye, she saw her face change; she saw her cheek whiten, her eyes stare, and her lips quiver, and she knew at once who it was; for she had not seen her before as Folk-might had. Then the Sun-beam cast her eyes adown, lest her compassion might show in her face, and be a fresh grief to her that had lost the wedding and the love; and so she passed on.

As for Folk-might, he had seen her at once amongst all that folk as he came into the street, and in sooth he was looking for her; and when he saw her face change, as the sight of the Sun-beam smote upon her heart, his own face burned with shame and anger, and he looked back at her as he went toward the House. But she saw him not, nor noted him; and none deemed it strange that he looked long on the Bride, the treasure of Burgstead. But for some while Folk-might was few-spoken and sharp-spoken amongst the chieftains; for he was slow to master his longing and his wrath.

So when all the Guests had entered the door of the House of the Face, the Alderman turned back, and, standing on the threshold of his House, spake unto the throng:

‘Men of the Dale, and ye Outlanders who may be here, know that this is a happy day; for hither have come to us Guests, men of the kindred of the Gods, and they are even those of whom Face-of-god my son hath told you. And they are friends of our friends and foes of our foes. These men are now in my House, as is but right; but when they come forth I look to you to cherish them in the best way ye know, and make much of them, as of those who may help us and who may by us be holpen.’

Therewith he went in again and into the Hall, and bade show the New-comers to the daïs; and wine of the best, and meat such as was to hand, was set before them. He bade men also get ready high feast as great as might be against the evening; and they did his bidding straightway.

CHAPTER XXXIII. THE ALDERMAN GIVES GIFTS TO THEM OF SHADOWY VALE.

In the Hall of the Face Folk-might sat on the daïs at the right hand of the Alderman, and the Sun-beam on his left hand. But Iron-face also had beheld the Bride how her face changed, and he knew the cause, and was grieved and angry and ashamed thereof: also he bethought him how this stranger was sitting in the very place where the Bride used to sit, and of all the love, as of a very daughter, that he had had for her; howbeit he constrained himself to talk courteously and kindly both to Folk-might and the Sun-beam, as behoved the Chief of the House and the Alderman of the Dale. Moreover, he was not a little moved by the goodliness and wisdom of the Sun-beam and the manliness of Folk-might, who was the most chieftain-like of men.

But while they sat there Face-of-god went from man to man of the Guests, and made much of each, but especially of Wood-father and his sons and Bow-may, and they loved him, and praised him, and deemed him the best of hall-mates. Nor might the Sun-beam altogether refrain her from looking lovingly on him, and it could be seen of her that she deemed he was doing well, and like a wise leader and chieftain.

So wore away awhile, and men were fulfilled of meat and drink; so then the Alderman arose and spake, and said:

‘Is it not so, Guests, that ye would now gladly behold our market, and the goodly wares which the chapmen have brought us from the Cities?’

Then most men cried out: ‘Yea, yea!’ and Iron-face said:

‘Then shall ye go, nor be holden by me from your pleasure. And ye kinsmen who are the most guest-fain and the wisest, go ye with our friends, and make all things easy and happy for them. But first of all, Guests, I were well pleased if ye would take some small matters out of our abundance; for it were well that ye see them ere ye stand before the chapmen’s booths, lest ye chaffer with them for what ye have already.’

They all praised his bounty and thanked him for his goodwill: so he arose to go to his treasury, and bade certain of his folk go along with him to bear in the gifts. But ere he had taken three steps down the hall, Face-of-god prevented him and said:

‘Kinsman, if thou hast anywhere a hauberk somewhat better than folk are wont to bear, such as thine own hand fashioneth, and a sword of the like stuff, I would have thee give them, the sword to my brother-in-arms Wood-wise here, and the war-coat to my sister Bow-may, who shooteth so well in the bow that none may shoot closer, and very few as close; and her shaft it was that delivered me when my skull was amongst the axes of the Dusky Men: else had I not been here.’

Thereat Bow-may reddened and looked down, like a scholar who hath been over-praised for his learning and diligence; but the Alderman smiled on her and said:

‘I thank thee, son, that thou hast let me know what these our two friends may be fain of: and as for this damsel-at-arms, it is a little thing that thou askest for her, and we might have found her something more worthy of her goodliness; yet forsooth, since we are all bound for the place where shafts and staves shall be good cheap, a greater treasure might be of less avail to her.’

Thereat men laughed, and the Alderman went down the Hall with those bearers of gifts, and was away for a space while they drank and made merry: but presently back they came from the treasury bearing loads of goodly things which were laid on one of the endlong boards. Then began the gift-giving: and first he gave unto Folk-might six golden cups marvellously fashioned, the work of four generations of wrights in the Dale, and he himself had wrought the last two thereof. To Sun-beam he gave a girdle of gold, fashioned with great mastery, whereon were images of the Gods and the Fathers, and warriors, and beasts of the field and fowls of the air; and as he girt it about her loins, he said in a soft voice so that few heard:

‘Sun-beam, thou fair woman, time has been when thou wert to us as the edge of the poisonous sword or the midnight torch of the murderer; but now I know not how it will be, or if the grief which thou hast given me will ever wear out or not. And now that I have beheld thee, I have little to do to blame my son; for indeed when I look on thee I cannot deem that there is any evil in thee. Yea, however it may be, take thou this gift as the reward of thine exceeding beauty.’

She looked on him with kind eyes, and said meekly:

‘Indeed, if I have hurt thee unwittingly, I grieve to have hurt so good a man. Hereafter

belike we may talk more of this, but now I will but say, that whereas at first I needed but to win thy son's goodwill, so that our Folk might come to life and thriving again, now it is come to this, that he holdeth my heart in his hand and may do what he will with it; therefore I pray thee withhold not thy love either from him or from me.'

He looked on her wondering, and said: 'Thou art such an one as might make the old man young, and the boy grow into manhood suddenly; and thy voice is as sweet as the voice of the song-birds singing in the dawn of early summer soundeth to him who hath been sick unto death, but who hath escaped it and is mending. And yet I fear thee.'

Therewith he kissed her hand and turned unto the others, and he gave unto Bow-may a hauberk of ring-mail of his own fashioning, a sure defence and a wonderful work, and the collar thereof was done with gold and gems.

But he said to her: 'Fair damsel-at-arms, faithful is thy face, and the fashion of thee is goodly: now art thou become one of the best of our friends, and this is little enough to give thee; yet would we fain ward thy body against the foeman; so grieve us not by gainsaying us.'

And Bow-may was exceeding glad, and scarce knew how to cease handling that marvel of ring-mail.

Then to Wood-wise Iron-face gave a most goodly sword, the blade all marked with dark lines like the stream of an eddying river, the hilts of steel and gold marvellously wrought; and all the work of a smith who had dwelt in the house of his father's father, and was a great warrior.

Unto Wood-father he gave a very goodly helm parcel-gilded; and to his sons and the other folk fair gifts of weapons and jewels and girdles and cups and other good things; so that their hearts were full of joy, and they all praised his open hand.

Then some of the best and merriest of the kinsmen of the Face, and Face-of-god with them, brought the Guests out into the street and among the booths. There Face-of-god beheld the Bride again; and she was standing by the booth of a chapman and dealing with him for a piece of goodly silken cloth to be a gown for one of her guests, and she was talking and smiling as she chaffered with him, as her wont was; for she was ever very friendly of demeanour with all men. But he noted that she was yet exceeding pale, and he was right sorry thereof, for he loved her friendly; yet now had he no shame for all that had befallen, when he bethought him of the Sun-beam and the love she had for him. And also he had a deeming that the Bride would better of her grief.

CHAPTER XXXIV. THE CHIEFTAINS TAKE COUNSEL IN THE HALL OF THE FACE.

Then turned Face-of-god back into the Hall, and saw where Iron-face sat at the daïs, and with him Folk-might and Stone-face and the Elder of the Dale-wardens, and Sun-beam withal; so he went soberly up to the board, and sat himself down thereat beside Stone-face, over against Folk-might and his father, beside whom sat the Sun-beam; and Folk-might looked on him gravely, as a man powerful and trustworthy, yet was his look somewhat sour.

Then the Alderman said: 'My son, I said not to thee come back presently, because I wotted that thou wouldst surely do so, knowing that we have much to speak of. For, whatever these thy friends may have done, or whatsoever thou hast done with them to grieve us, all that must be set aside at this present time, since the matter in hand is to save the Dale and its folk. What sayest thou hereon? Since, young as thou mayst be, thou art our War-leader, and doubtless shalt so be after the Folk-mote hath been holden.'

Face-of-god answered not hastily: indeed, as he sat thinking for a minute or two, the fair spring day seemed to darken about them or to glare into the light of flames amidst the night-tide; and the joyous clamour without doors seemed to grow hoarse and fearful as the sound of wailing and shrieking. But he spake firmly and simply in a clear voice, and said:

'There can be no two words concerning what we have to aim at; these Dusky Men we must slay everyone, though we be fewer than they be.'

Folk-might smiled and nodded his head; but the others sat staring down the hall or into the hangings.

Then spake Folk-might: 'Thou wert a boy methought when I cast my spear at thee last autumn, Face-of-god, but now hast thou grown into a man. Now tell me, what deemest thou we must do to slay them all?'

Said Face-of-god: 'Once again it is clear that we must fall upon them at home in Rose-dale and Silver-dale.'

Again Folk-might nodded: but Iron-face said:

'Needeth this? May we not ward the Dale and send many bands into the wood to fall upon them when we meet them? Yea, and so doing these our guests have already slain many, as this valiant man hath told me e'en now. Will ye not slay so many at last, that they shall learn to fear us, and abide at home and leave us at peace?'

But Face-of-god said: 'Meseemeth, father, that this is not thy rede, and that thou sayest this but to try me: and perchance ye have been talking about me when I was without in the street e'en now. Even if it might be that we should thus cow these felons into abiding at home and tormenting their own thralls at their ease, yet how then are our friends of the Wolf holpen to their own again? And I shall tell thee that I have promised to this man and this woman that I will give them no less than a man's help in this matter. Moreover, I have spoken in every house of the Dale, and to the Shepherds and the Woodlanders, and there is no man amongst them but will follow me in the quarrel. Furthermore, they have heard of the thralldom that is done on men no great way from their own houses; yea, they have seen it; and they remember the old saw, "Grief in thy neighbour's hall is grief in thy garth," and sure it is, father, that whether thou or I gainsay them, go they will to deliver the thralls of the Dusky Men, and will leave us alone in the Dale.'

'This is no less than sooth,' said the Dale-warden, 'never have men gone forth more joyously to a merry-making than all men of us shall wend to this war.'

'But,' said Face-of-god, 'of one thing ye may be sure, that these men will not abide our pleasure till we cut them all off in scattered bands, nor will they sit deedless at home. Nor indeed may they; for we have heard from their thralls that they look to have fresh tribes of them come to hand to eat their meat and waste their servants, and these and they must find new abodes and new thralls; and they are now warned by the overthrows and slayings that they have had at our hands that we are astir, and they will not delay long, but will fall upon us with all their host; it might even be to-day or to-morrow.'

Said Folk-might: 'In all this thou sayest sooth, brother of the Dale; and to cut this matter short, I will tell you all, that yesterday we had with us a runaway from Silver-dale (it is over-long to tell how we fell in with her; for it was a woman). But she told us that this very moon is a new tribe come into the Dale, six long hundreds in number, and twice as many more are looked for in two eights of days, and that ere this moon hath waned, that is, in twenty-four days, they will wend their ways straight for Burgdale, for they know the ways thereto. So I say that Face-of-god is right in all wise. But tell me, brother, hast thou thought of how we shall come upon these men?'

'How many men wilt thou lead into battle?' said Face-of-god.

Folk-might reddened, and said: 'A few, a few; maybe two-hundreds all told.'

'Yea,' said Face-of-god, 'but some special gain wilt thou be to us.'

'So I deem at least,' said Folk-might.

Said Face-of-god: 'Good is that. Now have we held our Weapon-show in the Dale, and we find that we together with you be sixteen long hundreds of men; and the tale of the foemen that be now in Silver-dale, new-comers and all, shall be three thousands or thereabout, and in Rose-dale hard on a thousand.'

'Scarce so many,' said Folk-might; 'some of the felons have died; we told over our silver arm-rings yesterday, and the tale was three hundred and eighty and six. Besides, they were never so many as thou deemest.'

'Well,' said Face-of-god, 'yet at least they shall outnumber us sorely. We may scarce leave the Dale unguarded when our host is gone; therefore I deem that we shall have but one thousand of men for our onslaught on Silver-dale.'

'How come ye to that?' said Stone-face.

Said Face-of-god: 'Abide a while, fosterer! Though the odds between us be great, it is not to be hidden that I wot how ye of the Wolf know of privy passes into Silver-dale; yea, into the heart thereof; and this is the special gain ye have to give us. Therefore we, the thousand men, falling on the foe unawares, shall make a great slaughter of them; and if the murder be but grim enough, those thralls of theirs shall fear us and not them, as already they hate them and not us, so that we may look to them for rooting out these sorry weeds after the

overthrow. And what with one thing, what with another, we may cherish a good hope of clearing Silver-dale at one stroke with the said thousand men.

‘There remaineth Rose-dale, which will be easier to deal with, because the Dusky Men therein are fewer and the thralls as many: that also would I fall on at the same time as we fall on Silver-dale with the men that are left over from the Silver-dale onslaught. Wherefore my rede is, that we gather all those unmeet for battle in the field into this Burg, with ten tens of men to strengthen them; which shall be enough for them, along with the old men, and lads, and sturdy women, to defend themselves till help comes, if aught of evil befall, or to flee into the mountains, or at the worst to die valiantly. Then let the other five hundreds fare up to Rose-dale, and fall on the Dusky Men therein about the same time, but not before our onslaught on Silver-dale: thus shall hand help foot, so that stumbling be not falling; and we may well hope that our rede shall thrive.’

Then was he silent, and the Sun-beam looked upon him with gleaming eyes and parted lips, waiting eagerly to hear what Folk-might would say. He held his peace a while, drumming on the board with his fingers, and none else spake a word. At last he said:

‘War-leader of Burgdale, all that thou hast spoken likes me well, and even so must it be done, saving that parting of our host and sending one part to fall upon Rose-dale. I say, nay; let us put all our might into that one stroke on Silver-dale, and then we are undone indeed if we fail; but so shall we be if we fail anywise; but if we win Silver-dale, then shall Rose-dale lie open before us.’

‘My brother,’ said Face-of-god, ‘thou art a tried warrior, and I but a lad: but dost thou not see this, that whatever we do, we shall not at one onslaught slay all the Dusky Men of Silver-dale, and those that flee before us shall betake them to Rose-dale, and tell all the tale, and what shall hinder them then from falling on Burgdale (since they are no great way from it) after they have murdered what they will of the unhappy people under their hands?’

Said Folk-might: ‘I say not but that there is a risk thereof, but in war we must needs run such risks, and all should be risked rather than that our blow on Silver-dale be light. For we be the fewer; and if the foemen have time to call that to mind, then are we all lost.’

Said Stone-face: ‘Meseemeth, War-leader, that there is nought much to dread in leaving Rose-dale to itself for a while; for not only may we follow hard on the fleers if they flee to Rose-dale, and be there no long time after them, before they have time to stir their host; but also after the overthrow we shall be free to send men back to Burgdale by way of Shadowy Vale. I deem that herein Folk-might hath the right of it.’

‘Even so say I,’ said the Alderman; ‘besides, we might theft leave more folk behind us for the warding of the Dale. So, son, the risk whereof thou speakest groweth the lesser the longer it is looked on.’

Then spake the Dale-warden: ‘Yet saving your wisdom, Alderman, the risk is there yet. For if these felons come into the Dale at all, even if the folk left behind hold the Burg and keep themselves unmurdered, yet may they not hinder the foe from spoiling our homesteads; so that our folk coming back in triumph shall find ruin at home, and spend weary days in hunting their foemen, who shall, many of them, escape into the Wild-wood.’

‘Yea,’ said the Sun-beam, ‘sooth is that; and Face-of-god is wise to think of it and of other matters. Yet one thing we must bear in mind, that all may not go smoothly in our day’s work in Silver-dale; so we must have force there to fall back on, in case we miss our stroke at first. Therefore, I say, send we no man to Rose-dale, and leave we no able man-at-arms behind in the Burg, so that we have with us every blade that may be gathered.’

Iron-face smiled and said: ‘Thou art wise, damsel; and I marvel that so fair-fashioned a thing as thou can think so hardly of the meeting of the fallow blades. But hearken! will not the Dusky Men hear that we have stripped the Dale of fighting-men, and may they not then give our host the go-by and send folk to ruin us?’

There was silence while Face-of-god looked down on the board; but presently he lifted up his face and said:

‘Folk-might was right when he said that all must be risked. Let us leave Rose-dale till we have overcome them of Silver-dale. Moreover, my father, thou must not deem of these felons as if they were of like wits to us, to forecast the deeds to come, and weigh the chances nicely, and unravel tangled clews. Rather they move like to the stares in autumn, or the winter wild-geese, and will all be thrust forward by some sting that entereth into their imaginations. Therefore, if they have appointed one moon to wear before they fall upon us, they

will not stir till then, and we have time enough to do what must be done. Wherefore am I now of one mind with the rest of you. Now meseemeth it were well that these things which we have spoken here, and shall speak, should not be noised abroad openly; nay, at the Folk-mote it would be well that nought be said about the day or the way of our onslaught on Silver-dale, lest the foe take warning and be on their guard. Though, sooth to say, did I deem that if they had word of our intent they of Rose-dale would join themselves to them of Silver-dale, and that we should thus have all our foes in one net, then were I fain if the word would reach them. For my soul loathes the hunting that shall befall up and down the wood for the slaying of a man here, and two or three there, and the wearing of the days in wandering up and down with weapons in the hand, and the spinning out of hatred and delaying of peace.'

Then Iron-face reached his hand across the board and took his son's hand, and said:

'Hail to thee, son, for thy word! Herein thou speakest as if from my very soul, and fain am I of such a War-leader.'

And desire drew the eyes of the Sun-beam to Face-of-god, and she beheld him proudly. But he said:

'All hath been spoken that the others of us may speak; and now it falleth to the part of Folk-might to order our goings for the tryst for the onslaught, and the trysting-place shall be in Shadowy Vale. How sayest thou, Chief of the Wolf?'

Said Folk-might: 'I have little to say; and it is for the War-leader to see to this closely and piecemeal. I deem, as we all deem, that there should be no delay; yet were it best to wend not all together to Shadowy Vale, but in divers bands, as soon as ye may after the Folk-mote, by the sure and nigh ways that we shall show you. And when we are gathered there, short is the rede, for all is ready there to wend by the passes which we know throughly, and whereby it is but two days' journey to the head of Silver-dale, nigh to the caves of the silver, where the felons dwell the thickest.'

He set his teeth, and his colour came and went: for as constantly as the onslaught had been in his mind, yet whenever he spake of the great day of battle, hope and joy and anger wrought a tumult in his soul; and now that it was so nigh withal, he could not refrain his joy.

But he spake again: 'Now therefore, War-leader, it is for thee to order the goings of thy folk. But I will tell thee that they shall not need to take aught with them save their weapons and victual for the way, that is, for thirty hours; because all is ready for them in Shadowy Vale, though it be but a poor place as to victual. Canst thou tell us, therefore, what thou wilt do?'

Face-of-god had knit his brows and become gloomy of countenance; but now his face cleared, and he set his hand to his pouch, and drew forth a written parchment, and said:

'This is the order whereof I have bethought me. Before the Folk-mote I and the Wardens shall speak to the leaders of hundreds, who be mostly here at the Fair, and give them the day and the hour whereon they shall, each hundred, take their weapons and wend to Shadowy Vale, and also the place where they shall meet the men of yours who shall lead them across the Waste. These hundred-leaders shall then go straightway and give the word to the captains of scores, and the captains of scores to the captains of tens; and if, as is scarce doubtful, the Folk-mote yea-says the onslaught and the fellowship with you of the Wolf, then shall those leaders of tens bring their men to the trysting-place, and so go their ways to Shadowy Vale. Now here I have the roll of our Weapon-show, and I will look to it that none shall be passed over; and if ye ask me in what order they had best get on the way, my rede is that a two hundred should depart on the very evening of the day of the Folk-mote, and these to be of our folk of the Upper Dale; and on the morning of the morrow of the Folk-mote another two hundreds from the Dale; and in the evening of the same day the folk of the Shepherds, three hundreds or more, and that will be easy to them; again on the next day two more bands of the Lower Dale, one in the morning, one in the evening. Lastly, in the earliest dawn of the third day from the Folk-mote shall the Woodlanders wend their ways. But one hundred of men let us leave behind for the warding of the Burg, even as we agreed before. As for the place of tryst for the faring over the Waste, let it be the end of the knolls just by the jaws of the pass yonder, where the Weltering Water comes into the Dale from the East. How say ye?'

They all said, and Folk-might especially, that it was right well devised, and that thus it should be done.

Then turned Face-of-god to the Dale-warden, and said:

'It were good, brother, that we saw the other wardens as soon as may be, to do them to wit of this order, and what they have to do.'

Therewith he arose and took the Elder of the Dale-wardens away with him, and the twain set about their business straight-way. Neither did the others abide long in the Hall, but went out into the Burg to see the chapmen and their wares. There the Alderman bought what he needed of iron and steel and other matters; and Folk-might cheapened him a dagger curiously wrought, and a web of gold and silk for the Sun-beam, for which wares he paid in silver arm-rings, new-wrought and of strange fashion.

But amidst of the chaffer was now a great ring of men; and in the midst of the ring stood Redesman, fiddle and bow in hand, and with him were four damsels wondrously arrayed; for the first was clad in a smock so craftily wrought with threads of green and many colours, that it seemed like a piece of the green field beset with primroses and cowslips and harebells and windflowers, rather than a garment woven and sewn; and in her hand she bore a naked sword, with golden hilts and gleaming blade. But the second bore on her roses done in like manner, both blossoms and green leaves, wherewith her body was covered decently, which else had been naked. The third was clad as though she were wading the wheat-field to the waist, and above was wrapped in the leaves and bunches of the wine-tree. And the fourth was clad in a scarlet gown flecked with white wool to set forth the winter's snow, and broidered over with the burning brands of the Holy Hearth; and she bore on her head a garland of mistletoe. And these four damsels were clearly seen to image the four seasons of the year—Spring, Summer, Autumn, and Winter. But amidst them stood a fountain or conduit of gilded work cunningly wrought, and full of the best wine of the Dale, and gilded cups and beakers hung about it.

So now Redesman fell to caressing his fiddle with the bow till it began to make sweet music, and therewith the hearts of all danced with it; and presently words come into his mouth, and he fell to singing; and the damsels answered him:

Earth-wielders, that fashion the Dale-dwellers' treasure,
Soft are ye by seeming, yet hardy of heart!
No warrior amongst us withstandeth your pleasure;
No man from his meadow may thrust you apart.
Fresh and fair are your bodies, but far beyond telling
Are the years of your lives, and the craft ye have stored.
Come give us a word, then, concerning our dwelling,
And the days to befall us, the fruit of the sword.

Winter saith:

When last in the feast-hall the Yule-fire flickered,
The foot of no foeman fared over the snow,
And nought but the wind with the ash-branches bickered:
Next Yule ye may deem it a long time ago.

Autumn saith:

Loud laughed ye last year in the wheat-field a-smiting;
And ye laughed as your backs drave the beam of the press.
When the edge of the war-sword the acres are lighting
Look up to the Banner and laugh ye no less.

Summer saith:

Ye called and I came, and how good was the greeting,
When ye wrapped me in roses both bosom and side!
Here yet shall I long, and be fain of our meeting,
As hidden from battle your coming I bide.

Spring saith:

I am here for your comfort, and lo! what I carry;
The blade with the bright edges bared to the sun.
To the field, to the work then, that e'en I may tarry
For the end of the tale in my first days begun!

Therewith the throng opened, and a young man stepped lightly into the ring, clad in very fair armour, with a gilded helm on his head; and he took the sword from the hand of the Maiden of Spring, and waved it in the air till the westering sun flashed back from it. Then each of the four damsels went up to the swain and kissed his mouth; and Redesman drew the bow across the strings, and the four damsels sang together, standing round about the young warrior:

It was but a while since for earth's sake we trembled,
Lest the increase our life-days had won for the Dale,
All the wealth that the moons and the years had assembled,
Should be but a mock for the days of your bale.

But now we behold the sun smite on the token
 In the hand of the Champion, the heart of a man;
 We look down the long years and see them unbroken;
 Forth fareth the Folk by the ways it began.
 So bid ye these chapmen in autumn returning,
 To bring iron for ploughshares and steel for the scythe,
 And the over-sea oil that hath felt the sun's burning,
 And fair webs for your women soft-spoken and blithe;
 And pledge ye your word in the market to meet them,
 As many a man and as many a maid,
 As eager as ever, as guest-fain to greet them,
 And bide till the booth from the waggon is made.
 Come, guests of our lovers! for we, the year-wielders,
 Bid each man and all to come hither and take
 A cup from our hands midst the peace of our shielders,
 And drink to the days of the Dale that we make.

Then went the damsels to that wine-fountain, and drew thence cups of the best and brightest wine of the Dale, and went round about the ring, and gave drink to whomsoever would, both of the chapmen and the others; while the weaponed youth stood in the midst bearing aloft his sword and shield like an image in a holy place, and Redesman's bow still went up and down the strings, and drew forth a sweet and merry tune.

Great game it was now to see the stark Burgdale carles dragging the Men of the Plain, little loth, up to the front of the ring, that they might stretch out their hands for a cup, and how many a one, as he took it, took as much as he might of the damsel's hand withal. As for the damsels, they played the Holy Play very daintily, neither reddening nor laughing, but faring so solemnly, and withal so sweetly and bright-faced, that it might well have been deemed that they were in very sooth Maidens of the God of Earth sent from the ever-enduring Hall to cheer the hearts of men.

So simply and blithely did the Men of Burgdale disport them after the manner of their fathers, trusting in their valour and beholding the good days to be.

So wore the evening, and when night was come, men feasted throughout the Burg from house to house, and every hall was full. But the Guests from Shadowy Vale feasted in the Hall of the Face in all glee and goodwill; and with them were the chief of the chapmen and two others; but the rest of them had been laid hold of by goodmen of the Burg, and dragged into their feast-halls, for they were fain of those guests and their tales. One of the chapmen in the House of the Face knew Folk-might, and hailed him by the name he had borne in the Cities, Regulus to wit; indeed, the chief chapman knew him, and even somewhat over-well, for he had been held to ransom by Folk-might in those past days, and even yet feared him, because he, the chapman, had played somewhat of a dastard's part to him. But the other was an open-hearted and merry fellow, and no weakling; and Folk-might was fain of his talk concerning times bygone, and the fields they had foughten in, and other adventures that had befallen them, both good and evil.

As for Face-of-god, he went about the Hall soberly, and spake no more than behoved him, so as not to seem a mar-feast; for the image of the slaughter to be yet abode with him, and his heart foreboded the after-grief of the battle. He had no speech with the Sun-beam till men were sundering after the feast, and then he came close to her amidst of the turmoil, and said:

'Time presses on me these days; but if thou wouldest speak with me to-morrow as I would with thee, then mightest thou go on the Bridge of the Burg about sunrise, and I will be there, and we two only.'

Her face, which had been somewhat sad that evening (for she had been watching his), brightened at that word, and she took his hand as folk came thronging round about them, and said:

'Yea, friend, I shall be there, and fain of thee.' And therewithal they sundered for that night.

And all men went to sleep throughout the Burg: howbeit they set a watch at the Burg-Gate; and Hall-face, when he was coming back from the woodland ward about sunset, fell in with Redcoat of Waterless and four score men on the Portway coming to meet him and take his place. All which was clean contrary to the wont of the Burgdalers, who at most whiles held no watch and ward, not even in Fair-time.

CHAPTER XXXV. FACE-OF-GOD TALKETH WITH THE SUN-BEAM.

Face-of-God was at the Bridge on the morrow before sun-rising, and as he turned about at the

Bridge-foot he saw the Sun-beam coming down the street; and his heart rose to his mouth at the sight of her, and he went to meet her and took her by the hand; and there were no words between them till they had kissed and caressed each other, for there was no one stirring about them. So they went over the Bridge into the meadows, and eastward of the beaten path thereover.

The grass was growing thick and strong, and it was full of flowers, as the cowslip and the oxlip, and the chequered daffodil, and the wild tulip: the black-thorn was well-nigh done blooming, but the hawthorn was in bud, and in some places growing white. It was a fair morning, warm and cloudless, but the night had been misty, and the haze still hung about the meadows of the Dale where they were wettest, and the grass and its flowers were heavy with dew, so that the Sun-beam went barefoot in the meadow. She had a dark cloak cast over her kirtle, and had left her glittering gown behind her in the House.

They went along hand in hand exceeding fain of each other, and the sun rose as they went, and the long beams of gold shone through the tops of the tall trees across the grass they trod, and a light wind rose up in the north, as Face-of-god stayed a moment and turned toward the Face of the Sun and prayed to Him, while the Sun-beam's hand left the War-leader's hand and stole up to his golden locks and lay amongst them.

Presently they went on, and the feet of Face-of-god led him unwitting toward the chestnut grove by the old dyke where he had met the Bride such a little while ago, till he bethought whither he was going and stopped short and reddened; and the Sun-beam noted it, but spake not; but he said: 'Hereby is a fair place for us to sit and talk till the day's work beginneth.'

So then he turned aside, and soon they came to a hawthorn brake out of which arose a great tall-stemmed oak, showing no green as yet save a little on its lower twigs; and anigh it, yet with room for its boughs to grow freely, was a great bird-cherry tree, all covered now with sweet-smelling white blossoms. There they sat down on the trunk of a tree felled last year, and she cast off her cloak, and took his face between her two hands and kissed him long and fondly, and for a while their joy had no word. But when speech came to them, it was she that spake first and said:

'Gold-mane, my dear, sorely I wonder at thee and at me, how we are changed since that day last autumn when I first saw thee. Whiles I think, didst thou not laugh when thou wert by thyself that day, and mock at me privily, that I must needs take such wisdom on myself, and lesson thee standing like a stripling before me. Dost thou not call it all to mind and make merry over it, now that thou art become a great chieftain and a wise warrior, and I am yet what I always was, a young maiden of the kindred; save that now I abide no longer for my love?'

Her face was exceeding bright and rippled with joyous smiles, and he looked at her and deemed that her heart was overflowing with happiness, and he wondered at her indeed that she was so glad of him, and he said:

'Yea, indeed, oft do I see that morning in the woodland hall and thee and me therein, as one looketh on a picture; yea verily, and I laugh, yet is it for very bliss; neither do I mock at all. Did I not deem thee a God then? and am I not most happy now when I can call it thus to mind? And as to thee, thou wert wise then, and yet art thou wise now. Yea, I thought thee a God; and if we are changed, is it not rather that thou hast lifted me up to thee, and not come down to me?'

Yet therewithal he knit his brows somewhat and said:

'Yet thou hast not to tell me that all thy love for thy Folk, and thy yearning hope for its recoverance, was but a painted show. Else why shouldst thou love me the better now that I am become a chieftain, and therefore am more meet to understand thy hope and thy sorrow? Did I not behold thee as we stood before the Wolf of the Hall of Shadowy Vale, how the tears stood in thine eyes as thou beheldest him, and thine hand in mine quivered and clung to me, and thou wert all changed in a moment of time? Was all this then but a seeming and a beguilement?'

'O young man,' she said, 'hast thou not said it, that we stood there close together, and my hand in thine and desire growing up in me? Dost thou not know how this also quickeneth the story of our Folk, and our goodwill towards the living, and remembrance of the dead? Shall they have lived and desired, and we deny desire and life? Or tell me: what was it made thee so chieftain-like in the Hall yesterday, so that thou wert the master of all our wills, for as self-willed as some of us were? Was it not that I, whom thou deemest lovely, was thereby watching thee and rejoicing in thee? Did not the sweetness of thy love quicken thee? Yet

because of that was thy warrior's wisdom and thy foresight an empty show? Heedest thou nought the Folk of the Dale? Wouldest thou sunder from the children of the Fathers, and dwell amongst strangers?'

He kissed her and smiled on her and said: 'Did I not say of thee that thou wert wiser than the daughters of men? See how wise thou hast made me!'

She spake again: 'Nay, nay, there was no feigning in my love for my people. How couldest thou think it, when the Fathers and the kindred have made this body that thou lovest, and the voice of their songs is in the speech thou deemest sweet?'

He said: 'Sweet friend, I deemed not that there was feigning in thee: I was but wondering what I am and how I was fashioned, that I should make thee so glad that thou couldst for a while forget thy hope of the days before we met.'

She said: 'O how glad, how glad! Yet was I nought hapless. In despite of all trouble I had no down-weighting grief, and I had the hope of my people before me. Good were my days; but I knew not till now how glad a child of man may be.'

Their words were hushed for a while amidst their caresses. Then she said:

'Gold-mane, my friend, I mocked not my past self because I deem that I was a fool then, but because I see now that all that my wisdom could do, would have come about without my wisdom; and that thou, deeming thyself something less than wise, didst accomplish the thing I craved, and that which thou didst crave also; and withal wisdom embraced thee, along with love.'

Therewith she cast her arms about him and said:

'O friend, I mock myself of this: that erst thou deemedst me a God and fearedst me, but now thou seemest to me to be a God, and I fear thee. Yea, though I have longed so sore to be with thee since the day of Shadowy Vale, and though I have wearied of the slow wearing of the days, and it hath tormented me; yet now that I am with thee, I bless the torment of my longing; for it is but my longing that compelleth me to cast away my fear of thee and caress thee, because I have learned how sweet it is to love thee thus.'

He wound his arms about her, and sweeter was their longing than mere joy; and though their love was beyond measure, yet was therein no shame to aught, not even to the lovely Dale and that fair season of spring, so goodly they were among the children of men.

In a while they arose and turned homeward, and went over the open meadow, and it was yet early, and the dew was as heavy on the grass as before, though the wide sunlight was now upon it, glittering on the wet blades, and shining through the bells of the chequered daffodils till they looked like gout of blood.

'Look,' said Sun-beam, as they went along by the same way whereas they came, 'deemest thou not that other speech-friends besides us have been abroad to talk together apart on this morning of the eve of battle. It is nought unwonted, that we do, even though we forget the trouble of the people to think of our own joy for a while.'

The smile died out of her face as she spoke, and she said:

'O friend, this much may I say for myself in all sooth, that indeed I would die for the kindred and its good days, nor falter therein; but if I am to die, might I but die in thine arms!'

He looked very lovingly on her, and put his arm about her and kissed her and said: 'What ails us to stand in the doom-ring and bear witness against ourselves before the kindred? Now I will say, that whatsoever the kindred may or can call upon me to do, that will I do, nor grudge the deed: I am sackless before them. But that is true which I spake to thee when we came together up out of Shadowy Vale, to wit, that I am no strifeful man, but a peaceful; and I look to it to win through this war, and find on the other side either death, or life amongst a happy folk; and I deem that this is mostly the mind of our people.'

She said: 'Thou shalt not die, thou shalt not die!'

'Mayhap not,' he said; 'yet yesterday I could not but look into the slaughter to come, and it seemed to me a grim thing, and darkened the day for me; and I grew acold as a man walking with the dead. But tell me: thou sayest I shall not die; dost thou say this only because I am become dear to thee, or dost thou speak it out of thy foresight of things to come?'

She stopped and looked silently a while over the meadows towards the houses of the Thorp: they were standing now on the border of a shallow brook that ran down toward the Weltering Water; it had a little strand of fine sand like the sea-shore, driven close together, and all moist, because that brook was used to flood the meadow for the feeding of the grass; and the last

evening the hatches which held up the water had been drawn, so that much had ebbed away and left the strand aforesaid.

After a while the Sun-beam turned to Face-of-god, and she was become somewhat pale; she said:

‘Nay, I have striven to see, and can see nought save the picture of hope and fear that I make for myself. So it oft befalleth foreseeing women, that the love of a man cloudeth their vision. Be content, dear friend; it is for life or death; but whichso it be, the same for me and thee together?’

‘Yea,’ he said, ‘and well content I am; so now let each of us trust in the other to be both good and dear, even as I trusted in thee the first hour that I looked on thee.’

‘It is well,’ she said; ‘it is well. How fair thou art; and how fair is the morn, and this our Dale in the goodly season; and all this abideth us when the battle is over.’

Once more her voice became sweet and wheedling, and the smile lit up her face again, and she pointed down to the sand with her finger, and said:

‘See thou! Here indeed have other lovers passed by across the brook. Shall we wish them good luck?’

He laughed and looked down on the sand, and said:

‘Thou art in haste to make a story up. Indeed I see that these first footprints are of a woman, for no carle of the Dale has a foot as small; for we be tall fellows; and these others withal are a man’s footprints; and if they showed that they had been walking side by side, simple had been thy tale; but so it is not. I cannot say that these two pairs of feet went over the brook within five minutes of each other; but sure it is that they could not have been faring side by side. Well, belike they were lovers bickering, and we may wish them luck out of that. Truly it is well seen that Bow-may hath done thine hunting for thee, dear friend; or else wouldest thou have lacked venison; for thou hast no hunter’s eye.’

‘Well,’ she said, ‘but wish them luck, and give me thine hand upon it.’

He took her hand, and fondled it, and said: ‘By this hand of my speech-friend, I wish these twain all luck, in love and in leisure, in faring and fighting, in sowing and samming, in getting and giving. Is it well enough wished? If so it be, then come thy ways, dear friend; for the day’s work is at hand.’

‘It is well wished,’ she said. ‘Now hearken: by the valiant hand of the War-leader, by the hand that shall unloose my girdle, I wish these twain to be as happy as we be.’

He made as if to draw her away, but she hung aback to set the print of her foot beside the woman’s foot, and then they went on together, and soon crossed the Bridge, and came home to the House of the Face.

When they had broken their fast, Face-of-god would straight get to his business of ordering matters for the warfare, and was wishful to speak with Folk-might; but found him not, either in the House or the street. But a man said:

‘I saw the tall Guest come abroad from the House and go toward the Bridge very early in the morning.’

The Sun-beam, who was anigh when that was spoken, heard it and smiled, and said: ‘Gold-mane, deemest thou that it was my brother whom we blessed?’

‘I wot not,’ he said; ‘but I would he were here, for this gear must speedily be looked to.’

Nevertheless it was nigh an hour before Folk-might came home to the House. He strode in lightly and gaily, and shaking the crest of his war-helm as he went. He looked friendly on Face-of-god, and said to him:

‘Thou hast been seeking me, War-leader; but grudge it not that I have caused thee to tarry. For as things have gone, I am twice the man for thine helping that I was yester-eve; and thou art so ready and deft, that all will be done in due time.’

He looked as if he would have had Face-of-god ask of him what made him so fain, but Face-of-god said only:

‘I am glad of thy gladness; but now let us dally no longer, for I have many folk to see to-day and much to set a-going.’

So therewith they spake together a while, and then went their ways together toward Carlstead and the Woodlanders.

CHAPTER XXXVI. FOLK-MIGHT SPEAKETH WITH THE BRIDE.

It must be told that those footprints which Face-of-god and the Sun-beam had blessed betwixt jest and earnest had more to do with them than they wotted of. For Folk-might, who had had many thoughts and longings since he had seen the Bride again, rose up early about sunrise, and went out-a-doors, and wandered about the Burg, letting his eyes stray over the goodly stone houses and their trim gardens, yet noting them little, since the Bride was not there.

At last he came to where there was an open place, straight-sided, longer than it was wide, with a wall on each side of it, over which showed the blossomed boughs of pear and cherry and plum-trees: on either hand before the wall was a row of great lindens, now showing their first tender green, especially on their lower twigs, where they were sheltered by the wall. At the nether end of this place Folk-might saw a grey stone house, and he went towards it betwixt the lindens, for it seemed right great, and presently was but a score of paces from its door, and as yet there was no man, carle or queen, stirring about it.

It was a long low house with a very steep roof; but belike the hall was built over some undercroft, for many steps went up to the door on either hand; and the doorway was low, with a straight lintel under its arch. This house, like the House of the Face, seemed ancient and somewhat strange, and Folk-might could not choose but take note of it. The front was all of good ashlar work, but it was carven all over, without heed being paid to the joints of the stones, into one picture of a flowery meadow, with tall trees and bushes in it, and fowl perched in the trees and running through the grass, and sheep and kine and oxen and horses feeding down the meadow; and over the door at the top of the stair was wrought a great steer bigger than all the other neat, whose head was turned toward the sun-rising and uplifted with open mouth, as though he were lowing aloud. Exceeding fair seemed that house to Folk-might, and as though it were the dwelling of some great kindred.

But he had scarce gone over it with his eyes, and was just about to draw nigher yet to it, when the door at the top of those steps opened, and a woman came out of the house clad in a green kirtle and a gown of brazil, with a golden-hilted sword girt to her side. Folk-might saw at once that it was the Bride, and drew aback behind one of the trees so that she might not see him, if she had not already seen him, as it seemed not that she had, for she stayed but for a moment on the top of the stair, looking out down the tree-rows, and then came down the stair and went soberly along the road, passing so close to Folk-might that he could see the fashion of her beauty closely, as one looks into the work of some defftest artificer. Then it came suddenly into his head that he would follow her and see whither she was wending. 'At least,' said he to himself, 'if I come not to speech with her, I shall be nigh unto her, and shall see somewhat of her beauty.'

So he came out quietly from behind the tree, and followed her softly; and he was clad in no garment save his kirtle, and bare no weapons to clash and jingle, though he had his helm on his head for lack of a softer hat. He kept her well in sight, and she went straight onward and looked not back. She went by the way whereas he had come, till they were in the main street, wherein as yet was no one afoot; she made her way to the Bridge, and passed over it into the meadows; but when she had gone but a few steps, she stayed a little and looked on the ground, and as she did so turned a little toward Folk-might, who had drawn back into the last of the refuges over the up-stream buttresses. He saw that there was a half-smile on her face, but he could not tell whether she were glad or sorry. A light wind was beginning to blow, that stirred her raiment and raised a lock of hair that had strayed from the golden fillet round about her head, and she looked most marvellous fair.

Now she looked along the grass that glittered under the beams of the newly-risen sun, and noted belike how heavy the dew lay on it; and the grass was high already, for the spring had been hot, and haysel would be early in the Dale. So she put off her shoes, that were of deerskin and broidered with golden threads, and turned somewhat from the way, and hung them up amidst the new green leaves of a hawthorn bush that stood nearby, and so went thwart the meadow somewhat eastward straight from that bush, and her feet shone out like pearls amidst the deep green grass.

Folk-might followed presently, and she stayed not again, nor turned, nor beheld him; he recked not if she had, for then would he have come up with her and hailed her, and he knew that she was no foolish maiden to start at the sight of a man who was the friend of her Folk.

So they went their ways till she came to the strand of the water-meadow brook aforesaid, and she went through the little ripples of the shallow without staying, and on through the tall

deep grass of the meadow beyond, to where they met the brook again; for it swept round the meadow in a wide curve, and turned back toward itself; so it was some half furlong over from water to water.

She stood a while on the brink of the brook here, which was brim-full and nigh running into the grass, because there was a dam just below the place; and Folk-might drew nigher to her under cover of the thorn-bushes, and looked at the place about her and beyond her. The meadow beyond stream was very fair and flowery, but not right great; for it was bounded by a grove of ancient chestnut trees, that went on and on toward the southern cliffs of the Dale: in front of the chestnut wood stood a broken row of black-thorn bushes, now growing green and losing their blossom, and he could see betwixt them that there was a grassy bank running along, as if there had once been a turf-wall and ditch round about the chestnut trees. For indeed this was the old place of tryst between Gold-mane and the Bride, whereof the tale hath told before.

The Bride stayed scarce longer than gave him time to note all this; but he deemed that she was weeping, though he could not rightly see her face; for her shoulders heaved, and she hung her face adown and put up her hands to it. But now she went a little higher up the stream, where the water was shallower, and waded the stream and went up over the meadow, still weeping, as he deemed, and went between the black-thorn bushes, and sat her down on the grassy bank with her back to the chestnut trees.

Folk-might was ashamed to have seen her weeping, and was half-minded to turn him back again at once; but love constrained him, and he said to himself, 'Where shall I see her again privily if I pass by this time and place?' So he waited a little till he deemed she might have mastered the passion of tears, and then came forth from his bush, and went down to the water and crossed it, and went quietly over the meadow straight towards her. But he was not half-way across, when she lifted up her face from between her hands and beheld the man coming. She neither started nor rose up; but straightened herself as she sat, and looked right into Folk-might's eyes as he drew near, though the tears were not dry on her cheeks.

Now he stood before her, and said: 'Hail to the Daughter of a mighty House! Mayst thou live happy!'

She answered: 'Hail to thee also, Guest of our Folk! Hast thou been wandering about our meadows, and happened on me perchance?'

'Nay,' he said; 'I saw thee come forth from the House of the Steer, and I followed thee hither.'

She reddened a little, and knit her brow, and said:

'Thou wilt have something to say to me?'

'I have much to say to thee,' he said; 'yet it was sweet to me to behold thee, even if I might not speak with thee.'

She looked on him with her deep simple eyes, and neither reddened again, nor seemed wroth; then she said:

'Speak what thou hast in thine heart, and I will hearken without anger whatsoever it may be; even if thou hast but to tell me of the passing folly of a mighty man, which in a month or two he will not remember for sorrow or for joy. Sit here beside me, and tell me thy thought.'

So he sat him adown and said: 'Yea, I have much to say to thee, but it is hard to me to say it. But this I will say: to-day and yesterday make the third time I have seen thee. The first time thou wert happy and calm, and no shadow of trouble was on thee; the second time thine happy days were waning, though thou scarce knewest it; but to-day and yesterday thou art constrained by the bonds of grief, and wouldest loosen them if thou mightest.'

She said: 'What meanest thou? How knowest thou this? How may a stranger partake in my joy and my sorrow?'

He said: 'As for yesterday, all the people might see thy grief and know it. But when I beheld thee the first time, I saw thee that thou wert more fair and lovely than all other women; and when I was away from thee, the thought of thee and thine image were with me, and I might not put them away; and oft at such and such a time I wondered and said to myself, what is she doing now? though god wot I was dealing with tangles and troubles and rough deeds enough. But the second time I beheld thee, when I had looked to have great joy in the sight of thee, my heart was smitten with a pang of grief; for I saw thee hanging on the words and the looks of another man, who was light-minded toward thee, and that thou wert troubled with the anguish of doubt and fear. And he knew it not, nor saw it, though I saw it.'

Her face grew troubled, and the tearful passion stirred within her. But she held it aback, and said, as anyone might have said it:

‘How wert thou in the Dale, mighty man? We saw thee not.’

He said: ‘I came hither hidden in other semblance than mine own. But meddle not therewith; it availeth nought. Let me say this, and do thou hearken to it. I saw thee yesterday in the street, and thou wert as the ghost of thine old gladness; although belike thou hast striven with sorrow; for I see thee with a sword by thy side, and we have been told that thou, O fairest of women, hast given thyself to the Warrior to be his damsel.’

‘Yea,’ she said, ‘that is sooth.’

He went on: ‘But the face which thou bearest yesterday against thy will, amidst all the people, that was because thou hadst seen my sister the Sun-beam for the first time, and Face-of-god with her, hand clinging to hand, lip longing for lip, desire unsatisfied, but glad with all hope.’

She laid hand upon hand in the lap of her gown, and looked down, and her voice trembled as she said:

‘Doth it avail to talk of this?’

He said: ‘I know not: it may avail; for I am grieved, and shall be whilst thou art grieved; and it is my wont to strive with my griefs till I amend them.’

She turned to him with kind eyes and said:

‘O mighty man, canst thou clear away the tangle which besetteth the soul of her whose hope hath bewrayed her? Canst thou make hope grow up in her heart? Friend, I will tell thee that when I wed, I shall wed for the sake of the kindred, hoping for no joy therein. Yea, or if by some chance the desire of man came again into my heart, I should strive with it to rid myself of it, for I should know of it that it was but a wasting folly, that should but beguile me, and wound me, and depart, leaving me empty of joy and heedless of life.’

He shook his head and said: ‘Even so thou deemest now; but one day it shall be otherwise. Or dost thou love thy sorrow? I tell thee, as it wears thee and wears thee, thou shalt hate it, and strive to shake it off.’

‘Nay, nay,’ she said; ‘I love it not; for not only it grieveth me, but also it beateth me down and belittleth me.’

‘Good is that,’ said he. ‘I know how strong thine heart is. Now, wilt thou take mine hand, which is verily the hand of thy friend, and remember what I have told thee of my grief which cannot be sundered from thine? Shall we not talk more concerning this? For surely I shall soon see thee again, and often; since the Warrior, who loveth me belike, leadeth thee into fellowship with me. Yea, I tell thee, O friend, that in that fellowship shalt thou find both the seed of hope, and the sun of desire that shall quicken it.’

Therewith he arose and stood before her, and held out to her his hand all hardened with the sword-hilt, and she took it, and stood up facing him, and said:

‘This much will I tell thee, O friend; that what I have said to thee this hour, I thought not to have said to any man; or to talk with a man of the grief that weareth me, or to suffer him to see my tears; and marvellous I deem it of thee, for all thy might, that thou hast drawn this speech from out of me, and left me neither angry nor ashamed, in spite of these tears; and thou whom I have known not, though thou knewest me!

‘But now it were best that thou depart, and get thee home to the House of the Face, where I was once so frequent; for I wot that thou hast much to do; and as thou sayest, it will be in warfare that I shall see thee. Now I thank thee for thy words and the thought thou hast had of me, and the pain which thou hast taken to heal my hurt: I thank thee, I thank thee, for as grievous as it is to show one’s hurts even to a friend.’

He said: ‘O Bride, I thank thee for hearkening to my tale; and one day shall I thank thee much more. Mayest thou fare well in the Field and amidst the Folk!’

Therewith he kissed her hand, and turned away, and went across the meadow and the stream, glad at heart and blithe with everyone; for kindness grew in him as gladness grew.

CHAPTER XXXVII. OF THE FOLK-MOTE OF THE DALESMEN, THE SHEPHERD-FOLK, AND THE WOODLAND CARLES: THE BANNER OF THE WOLF DISPLAYED.

Now came the day of the Great Folk-mote, and there was much thronging from everywhere

to the Mote-stead, but most from Burgstead itself, whereas few of the Dale-dwellers who had been at the Fair had gone back home. Albeit some of the Shepherds and of the Dalesmen of the westernmost Dale had brought light tents, and tilted themselves in in the night before the Mote down in the meadows below the Mote-stead. From early morning there had been a stream of folk on the Portway setting westward; and many came thus early that they might hold converse with friends and well-wishers; and some that they might disport them in the woods. Men went in no ordered bands, as the Burgstead men at least had done on the day of the Weapon-show, save that a few of them who were arrayed the bravest gathered about the banners, and went with them to the Mote-stead; for all the banners must needs be there.

The Folk-mote was to be hallowed-in three hours before noon, as all men knew; therefore an hour before that time were all men of the Dale and the Shepherds assembled that might be looked for, save the Alderman and the chieftains with the banner of the Burg, and these were not like to come many minutes before the Hallowing. Folk were gathered on the Field in such wise, that the men-at-arms made a great ring round about the Doom-ring, (albeit there were many old men there, girt with swords that they should never heave up again in battle), so that without that ring there was nought save women and children. But when all the other Houses were assembled, men looked around, and beheld the place of the Woodlanders that it was empty; and they marvelled that they were thus belated. For now all was ready, and a watcher had gone up to the Tower on the height, and had with him the great Horn of Warning, which could be heard past the Mote-stead and a great way down the Dale: and if he saw foes coming from the East he should blow one blast; if from the South, two; if from the West, three; if from the North, four.

So half an hour from the appointed time of Hallowing rose the rumour that the Alderman was on the road, and presently they of the women who were on the outside of the throng, by drawing nigh to the edge of the sheer rock, could behold the Banner of the Burg on the Portway, and soon after could see the wain, done about with green boughs, wherein sat the chieftains in their glittering war-gear. Speedily they spread the tidings, and a confused shout went up into the air; and in a little while the wain stayed on Wildlake's Way at the bottom of the steep slope that went up to the Mote-stead, and the banner of the Burg came on proudly up the hill. Soon all men beheld it, and saw that the tall Hall-face bore it in front of his brother Face-of-god, who came on gleaming in war-gear better than most men had seen; which was indeed of his father's fashioning, and his father's gift to him that morning.

After Face-of-god came the Alderman, and with him Folk-might leading the Sun-beam by the hand, and then Stone-face and the Elder of the Dale-wardens; and then the six Burg-wardens: as to the other Dale-wardens, they were in their places on the Field.

So now those who had been standing up turned their faces toward the Altar of the Gods, and those who had been sitting down sprang to their feet, and the confused rumour of the throng rose into a clear shout as the chieftains went to their places, and sat them down on the turf-seats amidst the Doom-ring facing the Speech-hill and the Altar of the Gods. Amidmost sat the Alderman, on his right hand Face-of-god, and out from him Hall-face, and then Stone-face and three of the Wardens; but on his left hand sat first the two Guests, then the Elder of the Dale-wardens, and then the other three Burg-wardens; as for the Banner of the Burg, its staff was stuck into the earth behind them, and the Banner raised itself in the morning wind and flapped and rippled over their heads.

There then they sat, and folk abided, and it still lacked some minutes of the due time, as the Alderman wotted by the shadow of the great standing-stone betwixt him and the Altar. Therewithal came the sound of a great horn from out of the wood on the north side, and men knew it for the horn of the Woodland Carles, and were glad; for they could not think why they should be belated; and now men stood up a-tiptoe and on other's shoulders to look over the heads of the women and children to behold their coming; but their empty place was at the southwest corner of the ring of men.

So presently men beheld them marching toward their place, cleaving the throng of the women and children, a great company; for besides that they had with them two score more of men under weapons than on the day of the Weapon-show, all their little ones and women and outworn elders were with them, some on foot, some riding on oxen and asses. In their forefront went the two signs of the Battle-shaft and the War-spear. But moreover, in front of all was borne a great staff with the cloth of a banner wrapped round about it, and tied up with a hempen yarn that it might not be seen.

Stark and mighty men they looked; tall and lean, broad-shouldered, dark-faced. As they came amongst the throng the voice of their horn died out, and for a few moments they fared on with no sound save the tramp of their feet; then all at once the man who bare the hidden banner lifted up one hand, and straightway they fell to singing, and with that song they came to their place. And this is some of what they sang:

O white, white Sun, what things of wonder
 Hast thou beheld from thy wall of the sky!
 All the Roofs of the Rich and the grief thereunder,
 As the fear of the Earl-folk flitteth by!
 Thou hast seen the Flame steal forth from the Forest
 To slay the slumber of the lands,
 As the Dusky Lord whom thou abhorrest
 Clomb up to thy Burg unbuilt with hands.
 Thou lookest down from thy door the golden,
 Nor batest thy wide-shining mirth,
 As the ramparts fall, and the roof-trees olden
 Lie smouldering low on the burning earth.
 When flitteth the half-dark night of summer
 From the face of the murder great and grim,
 'Tis thou thyself and no new-comer
 Shines golden-bright on the deed undim.
 Art thou our friend, O Day-dawn's Lover?
 Full oft thine hand hath sent aslant
 Bright beams athwart the Wood-bear's cover,
 Where the feeble folk and the nameless haunt.
 Thou hast seen us quail, thou hast seen us cower,
 Thou hast seen us crouch in the Green Abode,
 While for us wert thou slaying slow hour by hour,
 And smoothing down the war-rough road.
 Yea, the rocks of the Waste were thy Dawns upheaving,
 To let the days of the years go through;
 And thy Noons the tangled brake were cleaving
 The slow-foot seasons' deed to do.
 Then gaze adown on this gift of our giving,
 For the Wolf comes wending frith and ford,
 And the Folk fares forth from the dead to the living,
 For the love of the Lief by the light of the Sword.

Then ceased the song, and the whole band of the Woodlanders came pouring tumultuously into the space allotted them, like the waters pouring over a river-dam, their white swords waving aloft in the morning sunlight; and wild and strange cries rose up from amidst them, with sobbing and weeping of joy. But soon their troubled front sank back into ordered ranks, their bright blades stood upright in their hands before them, and folk looked on their company, and deemed it the very Terror of battle and Render of the ranks of war. Right well were they armed; for though many of their weapons were ancient and somewhat worn, yet were they the work of good smiths of old days; and moreover, if any of them lacked good war-gear of his own, that had the Alderman and his sons made good to them.

But before the hedge of steel stood the two tall men who held in their hands the war-tokens of the Battle-shaft and the War-spear, and betwixt them stood one who was indeed the tallest man of the whole assembly, who held the great staff of the hidden banner. And now he reached up his hand, and plucked at the yarn that bound it, which of set purpose was but feeble, and tore it off, and then shook the staff aloft with both hands, and shouted, and lo! the Banner of the Wolf with the Sun-burst behind him, glittering-bright, new-woven by the women of the kindred, ran out in the fresh wind, and flapped and rippled before His warriors there assembled.

Then from all over the Mote-stead arose an exceeding great shout, and all men waved aloft their weapons; but the men of Shadowy Vale who were standing amidst the men of the Face knew not how to demean themselves, and some of them ran forth into the Field and leapt for joy, tossing their swords into the air, and catching them by the hilts as they fell: and amidst it all the Woodlanders now stood silent, unmoving, as men abiding the word of onset.

As for that brother and sister: the Sun-beam flushed red all over her face, and pressed her hands to her bosom, and then the passion of tears over-mastered her, and her breast heaved, and the tears gushed out of her eyes, and her body was shaken with weeping. But Folk-might sat still, looking straight before him, his eyes glittering, his teeth set, his right hand clutching hard at the hilts of his sword, which lay naked across his knees. And the Bride, who stood clad in her begemmed and glittering war-array in the forefront of the Men of the Steer, nigh unto the seats of the chieftains, beheld Folk-might, and her face flushed and brightened, and

still she looked upon him. The Alderman's face was as of one pleased and proud; yet was its joy shadowed as it were by a cloud of compassion. Face-of-god sat like the very image of the War-god, and stirred not, nor looked toward the Sun-beam; for still the thought of the after-grief of battle, and the death of friends and folk that loved him, lay heavy on his heart, for all that it beat wildly at the shouting of the men.

CHAPTER XXXVIII. OF THE GREAT FOLK-MOTE: ATONEMENTS GIVEN, AND MEN MADE SACKLESS.

Amidst the clamour uprose the Alderman; for it was clear to all men that the Folk-mote should be holden at once, and the matters of the War, and the Fellowship, and the choosing of the War-leader, speedily dealt with. So the Alderman fell to hallowing in the Folk-mote: he went up to the Altar of the Gods, and took the Gold-ring off it, and did it on his arm; then he drew his sword and waved it toward the four airts, and spake; and the noise and shouting fell, and there was silence but for him:

'Herewith I hallow in this Folk-mote of the Men of the Dale and the Sheepcotes and the Woodland, in the name of the Warrior and the Earth-god and the Fathers of the kindreds. Now let not the peace of the Mote be broken. Let not man rise against man, or bear blade or hand, or stick or stone against any. If any man break the Peace of the Holy Mote, let him be a man accursed, a wild-beast in the Holy Places; an outcast from home and hearth, from bed and board, from mead and acre; not to be holpen with bread, nor flesh, nor wine; nor flax, nor wool, nor any cloth; nor with sword, nor shield, nor axe, nor plough-share; nor with horse, nor ox, nor ass; with no saddle-beast nor draught-beast; nor with wain, nor boat, nor way-leading; nor with fire nor water; nor with any world's wealth. Thus let him who hath cast out man be cast out by man. Now is hallowed-in the Folk-mote of the Men of the Dale and the Sheepcotes and the Woodlands.'

Therewith he waved his sword again toward the four airts, and went and sat down in his place. But presently he arose again, and said:

'Now if man hath aught to say against man, and claimeth boot of any, or would lay guilt on any man's head, let him come forth and declare it; and the judges shall be named, and the case shall be tried this afternoon or to-morrow. Yet first I shall tell you that I, the Alderman of the Dalesmen, doomed one Iron-face of the House of the Face to pay a double fine, for that he drew a sword at the Gate-thing of Burgstead with the intent to break the peace thereof. Thou, Green-sleeve, bring forth the peace-breaker's fine, that Iron-face may lay the same on the Altar.'

Then came forth a man from the men of the Face bearing a bag, and he brought it to Iron-face, who went up to the Altar and poured forth weighed gold from the bag thereon, and said:

'Warden of the Dale, come thou and weigh it!'

'Nay,' quoth the Warden, 'it needeth not, no man here doubteth thee, Alderman Iron-face.'

A murmur of yeasay went up, and none had a word to say against the Alderman, but they praised him rather: also men were eager to hear of the war, and the fellowship, and to be done with these petty matters. Then the Alderman rose again and said:

'Hath any man a grief against any other of the Kindreds of the Dale, or the Sheepcotes, or the Woodlands?'

None answered or stirred; so after he had waited a while, he said:

'Is there any who hath any guilt to lay against a Stranger, an Outlander, being such a man as he deems we can come at?'

Thereat was a stir amongst the Men of the Fleece of the Shepherds, and their ranks opened, and there came forth an ill-favoured lean old man, long-nebbed, blear-eyed, and bent, girt with a rusty old sword, but not otherwise armed. And all men knew Penny-thumb, who had been ransacked last autumn. As he came forth, it seemed as if his neighbours had been trying to hold him back; but a stout, broad-shouldered man, black-haired and red-bearded, made way for the old man, and led him out of the throng, and stood by him; and this man was well armed at all points, and looked a doughty carle. He stood side by side with Penny-thumb, right in front of the men of his house, and looked about him at first somewhat uneasily, as though he were ashamed of his fellow; but though many smiled, none laughed aloud; and they forbore, partly because they knew the man to be a good man, partly because of the solemn tide of the Folk-mote, and partly in sooth because they wished all this to be over, and were as men who

had no time for empty mirth.

Then said the Alderman: 'What wouldest thou, Penny-thumb, and thou, Bristler, son of Brightling?'

Then Penny-thumb began to speak in a high squeaky voice: 'Alderman, and Lord of the Folk!' But therewithal Bristle, pulled him back, and said:

'I am the man who hath taken this quarrel upon me, and have sworn upon the Holy Boar to carry this feud through; and we deem, Alderman, that if they who slew Rusty and ransacked Penny-thumb be not known now, yet they soon may be.'

As he spake, came forth those three men of the Shepherds and the two Dalesmen who had sworn with him on the Holy Boar. Then up stood Folk-might, and came forth into the field, and said:

'Bristler, son of Brightling, and ye other good men and true, it is but sooth that the ransackers and the slayer may soon be known; and here I declare them unto you: I it was and none other who slew Rusty; and I was the leader of those who ransacked Penny-thumb, and cowed Harts-bane of Greentofts. As for the slaying of Rusty, I slew him because he chased me, and would not forbear, so that I must either slay or be slain, as hath befallen me erewhile, and will befall again, methinks. As for the ransacking of Penny-thumb, I needed the goods that I took, and he needed them not, since he neither used them, nor gave them away, and, they being gone, he hath lived no worse than aforetime. Now I say, that if ye will take the outlawry off me, which, as I hear, ye laid upon me, not knowing me, then will I handsel self-doom to thee, Bristler, if thou wilt bear thy grief to purse, and I will pay thee what thou wilt out of hand; or if perchance thou wilt call me to Holm, thither will I go, if thou and I come unslain out of this war. As to the ransacking and cowing of Harts-bane, I say that I am sackless therein, because the man is but a ruffler and a man of violence, and hath cowed many men of the Dale; and if he gainsay me, then do I call him to the Holm after this war is over; either him or any man who will take his place before my sword.'

Then he held his peace, and man spake to man, and a murmur arose, as they said for the more part that it was a fair and manly offer. But Bristler called his fellows and Penny-thumb to him, and they spake together; and sometimes Penny-thumb's shrill squeak was heard above the deep-voiced talk of the others; for he was a man that harboured malice. But at last Bristler spake out and said:

'Tall man, we know that thou art a chieftain and of good will to the men of the Dale and their friends, and that want drave thee to the ransacking, and need to the manslaying, and neither the living nor the dead to whom thou art guilty are to be called good men; therefore will I bring the matter to purse, if thou wilt handsel me self-doom.'

'Yea, even so let it be,' quoth Folk-might; and stepped forward and took Bristler by the hand, and handselled him self-doom. Then said Bristler:

'Though Rusty was no good man, and though he followed thee to slay thee, yet was he in his right therein, since he was following up his goodman's gear; therefore shalt thou pay a full blood-wite for him, that is to say, the worth of three hundreds in weed-stuff in whatso goods thou wilt. As for the ransacking of Penny-thumb, he shall deem himself well paid if thou give him our hundreds in weed-stuff for that which thou didst borrow of him.'

Then Penny-thumb set up his squeak again, but no man hearkened to him, and each man said to his neighbour that it was well doomed of Bristler, and neither too much nor too little. But Folk-might bade Wood-wont to bring thither to him that which he had borne to the Mote; and he brought forth a big sack, and Folk-might emptied it on the earth, and lo! the silver rings of the slain felons, and they lay in a heap on the green field, and they were the best of silver. Then the Elder of the Dale-wardens weighed out from the heap the blood-wite for Rusty, according to the due measure of the hundred in weed-stuff, and delivered it unto Bristler. And Folk-might said:

'Draw nigh now, Penny-thumb, and take what thou wilt of this gear, which I need not, and grudge not at me henceforward.'

But Penny-thumb was afraid, and abode where he was; and Bristler laughed, and said: 'Take it, goodman, take it; spare not other men's goods as thou dost thine own.'

And Folk-might stood by, smiling faintly: so Penny-thumb plucked up a heart, and drew nigh trembling, and took what he durst from that heap; and all that stood by said that he had gotten a full double of what had been awarded to him. But as for him, he went his ways

straight from the Mote-stead, and made no stay till he had gotten him home, and laid the silver up in a strong coffer; and thereafter he bewailed him sorely that he had not taken the double of that which he took, since none would have said him nay.

When he was gone, the Alderman arose and said:

‘Now, since the fines have been paid duly and freely, according to the dooming of Bristler, take we off the outlawry from Folk-might and his fellows, and account them to be sackless before us.’

Then he called for other cases; but no man had aught more to bring forward against any man, either of the kindreds or the Strangers.

CHAPTER XXXIX. OF THE GREAT FOLK-MOTE: MEN TAKE REDE OF THE WAR-FARING, THE FELLOWSHIP, AND THE WAR-LEADER. FOLK-MIGHT TELLETH WHENCE HIS PEOPLE CAME. THE FOLK-MOTE SUNDERED.

Now a great silence fell upon the throng, and they stood as men abiding some new matter. Unto them arose the Alderman, and said:

‘Men of the Dale, and ye Shepherds and Woodlanders; it is well known to you that we have foemen in the wood and beyond it; and now have we gotten sure tidings, that they will not abide at home or in the wood, but are minded to fall upon us at home. Now therefore I will not ask you whether ye will have peace or war; for with these foemen ye may have peace no otherwise save by war. But if ye think with me, three things have ye to determine: first, whether ye will abide your foes in your own houses, or will go meet them at theirs; next, whether ye will take to you as fellows in arms a valiant folk of the children of the Gods, who are foemen to our foemen; and lastly, what man ye will have to be your War-leader. Now, I bid all those here assembled, to speak hereof, any man of them that will, either what they may have conceived in their own minds, or what their kindred may have put into their mouths to speak.’

Therewith he sat down, and in a little while came forth old Hall-ward of the House of the Steer, and stood before the Alderman, and said: ‘O Alderman, all we say: Since war is awake we will not tarry, but will go meet our foes while it is yet time. The valiant men of whom thou tellest shall be our fellows, were there but three of them. We know no better War-leader than Face-of-god of the House of the Face. Let him lead us.’

Therewith he went his ways; and next came forth War-well, and said: ‘The House of the Bridge would have Face-of-god for War-leader, these tall men for fellows, and the shortest way to meet the foe.’ And he went back to his place.

Next came Fox of Upton, and said: ‘Time presses, or much might be spoken. Thus saith the House of the Bull: Let us go meet the foe, and take these valiant strangers for way-leaders, and Face-of-god for War-leader.’ And he also went back again.

Then came forth two men together, an old man and a young, and the old man spake as soon as he stood still: ‘The Men of the Vine bid me say their will: They will not stay at home to have their houses burned over their heads, themselves slain on their own hearths, and their wives haled off to thralldom. They will take any man for their fellow in arms who will smite stark strokes on their side. They know Face-of-god, and were liefer of him for War-leader than any other, and they will follow him wheresoever he leadeth. Thus my kindred biddeth me say, and I hight Fork-beard of Lea. If I live through this war, I shall have lived through five.’

Therewith he went back to his place; but the young man lifted up his voice and said: ‘To all this I say yea, and so am I bidden by the kindred of the Sickles. I am Red-beard of the Knolls, the son of my father.’ And he went to his place again.

Then came forth Stone-face, and said: ‘The House of the Face saith: Lead us through the wood, O Face-of-god, thou War-leader, and ye warriors of the Wolf. I am Stone-face, as men know, and this word hath been given to me by the kindred.’ And he took his place again.

Then came forth together the three chiefs of the Shepherds, to wit Hound-under-Greenbury, Strongitharm, and the Hyllier; and Strongitharm spake for all three, and said:

‘The Men of Greenbury, and they of the Fleece and the Thorn, are of one accord, and bid us say that they are well pleased to have Face-of-god for War-leader; and that they will follow him and the warriors of the Wolf to live or die with them; and that they are ready to go meet

the foe at once, and will not skulk behind the walls of Greenbury.'

Therewith the three went back again to their places.

Then came forth that tall man that bare the Banner of the Wolf, when he had given the staff into the hands of him who stood next. He came and stood over against the seat of the chieftains; and for a while he could say no word, but stood struggling with the strong passion of his joy; but at last he lifted his hands aloft, and cried out in a loud voice:

'O war, war! O death! O wounding and grief! O loss of friends and kindred! let all this be rather than the drawing back of meeting hands and the sundering of yearning hearts!' and he went back hastily to his place. But from the ranks of the Woodlanders ran forth a young man, and cried out:

'As is the word of Red-wolf, so is my word, Bears-bane of Carlstead; and this is the word which our little Folk hath put into our mouths; and O! that our hands may show the meaning of our mouths; for nought else can.'

Then indeed went up a great shout, though many forebore to cry out; for now were they too much moved for words or sounds. And in special was Face-of-god moved; and he scarce knew which way to look, lest he should break out into sobs and weeping; for of late he had been much among the Woodlanders, and loved them much.

Then all the noise and clamour fell, and it was to men as if they who had come thither a folk, had now become an host of war.

But once again the Alderman rose up and spake:

'Now have ye yeasaid three things: That we take Face-of-god of the House of the Face for our War-leader; that we fare under weapons at once against them who would murder us; and that we take the valiant Folk of the Wolf for our fellows in arms.'

Therewith he stayed his speech, and this time the shout arose clear and most mighty, with the tossing up of swords and the clashing of weapons on shields.

Then he said: 'Now, if any man will speak, here is the War-leader, and here is the chief of our new friends, to answer to whatso any of the kindred would have answered.'

Thereon came forth the Fiddle from amongst the Men of the Sickle, and drew somewhat nigh to the Alderman, and said:

'Alderman, we would ask of the War-leader if he hath devised the manner of our assembling, and the way of our war-faring, and the day of our hosting. More than this I will not ask of him, because we wot that in so great an assembly it may be that the foe may have some spy of whom we wot not; and though this be not likely, yet some folk may babble; therefore it is best for the wise to be wise everywhere and always. Therefore my rede it is, that no man ask any more concerning this, but let it lie with the War-leader to bring us face to face with the foe as speedily as he may.'

All men said that this was well counselled. But Face-of-god arose and said: 'Ye Men of the Dale, ye Shepherds and Woodlanders, meseemeth the Fiddle hath spoken wisely. Now therefore I answer him and say, that I have so ordered everything since the Gate-thing was holden at Burgstead, that we may come face to face with the foemen by the shortest of roads. Every man shall be duly summoned to the Hosting, and if any man fail, let it be accounted a shame to him for ever.'

A great shout followed on his words, and he sat down again. But Fox of Upton came forth and said:

'O Alderman, we have yeasaid the fellowship of the valiant men who have come to us from out of the waste; but this we have done, not because we have known them, otherwise than by what our kinsman Face-of-god hath told us concerning them, but because we have seen clearly that they will be of much avail to us in our warfare. Now, therefore, if the tall chieftain who sitteth beside thee were to do us to wit what he is, and whence he and his are come, it were well, and fain were we thereof; but if he listeth not to tell us, that also shall be well.'

Then arose Folk-might in his place; but or ever he could open his mouth to speak, the tall Red-wolf strode forward bearing with him the Banner of the Wolf and the Sun-burst, and came and stood beside him; and the wind ran through the folds of the banner, and rippled it out above the heads of those twain. Then Folk-might spake and said:

'O Men of the Dale and the Sheepcotes, I will do as ye bid me do;
And fain were ye of the story if every deal ye knew.
But long, long were its telling, were I to tell it all:
Let it bide till the Cup of Deliverance ye drink from hall to hall.'

'Like you we be of the kindreds, of the Sons of the Gods we come,
Midst the Mid-earth's mighty Woodland of old we had our home;
But of older time we abided 'neath the mountains of the Earth,
O'er which the Sun ariseth to waken woe and mirth.

Great were we then and many; but the long days wore us thin,
And war, wherein the winner hath weary work to win.
And the woodland wall behind us e'en like ourselves was worn,
And the tramp of the hosts of the foemen adown its glades was borne
On the wind that bent our wheat-fields. So in the morn we rose,
And left behind the stubble and the autumn-fruited close,
And went our ways to the westward, nor turned aback to see
The glare of our burning houses rise over brake and tree.
But the foe was fierce and speedy, nor long they tarried there,
And through the woods of battle our laden wains must fare;
And the Sons of the Wolf were minished, and the maids of the Wolf waxed few,
As amidst the victory-singing we fared the wild-wood through.

'So saith the ancient story, that west and west we went,
And many a day of battle we had in brake, on bent;
Whilst here a while we tarried, and there we hastened on,
And still the battle-harvest from many a folk we won.

'Of the tale of the days who wotteth? Of the years what man can tell,
While the Sons of the Wolf were wandering, and knew not where to dwell?
But at last we clomb the mountains, and mickle was our toil,
As high the spear-wood clambered of the drivers of the spoil;
And tangled were the passes and the beacons flared behind,
And the horns of gathering onset came up upon the wind.
So saith the ancient story, that we stood in a mountain-cleft,
Where the ways and the valleys sundered to the right hand and the left.
There in the place of sundering all woeful was the rede;
We knew no land before us, and behind was heavy need.
As the sword cleaves through the byrny, so there the mountain flank
Cleft through the God-kin's people; and ne'er again we drank
The wine of war together, or feasted side by side
In the Feast-hall of the Warrior on the fruit of the battle-tide.
For there we turned and sundered; unto the North we went
And up along the waters, and the clattering stony bent;
And unto the South and the Sheepcotes down went our sister's sons;
And O for the years passed over since we saw those valiant ones!'

He ceased, and laid his right hand on the banner-staff a little below the left hand of Red-wolf; and men were so keen to hear each word that he spake, that there was no cry nor sound of voices when he had done, only the sound of the rippling banner of the Wolf over the heads of those twain. The Sun-beam bowed her head now, and wept silently. But the Bride, she had drawn her sword, and held it upright in her hand before her, and the sun smote fire from out of it.

Then it was but a little while before Red-wolf lifted up his voice, and sang:

'Hearken a wonder, O Folk of the Field,
How they that did sunder stand shield beside shield!
Lo! the old wont and manner by fearless folk made,
On the Bole of the Banner the brothers' hands laid.
Lo! here the token of what hath betid!
Grown whole is the broken, found that which was hid.
Now one way we follow whate'er shall befall;
As seeketh the swallow his yesteryear's hall.
Seldom folk fewer to fight-stead hath fared;
Ne'er have men truer the battle-reed bared.
Grey locks now I carry, and old am I grown,
Nor looked I to tarry to meet with mine own.
For we who remember the deeds of old days
Were nought but the ember of battle ablaze.
For what man might aid us? what deed and what day
Should come where Weird laid us aloof from the way?
What man save that other of Twain rent apart,
Our war-friend, our Brother, the piece of our heart.
Then hearken the wonder how shield beside shield
The twain that did sunder wend down to the Field!'

Now when he had made an end, men could no longer forbear the shout; and it went up into the heavens, and was borne by the west-wind down the Dale to the ears of the stay-at-home women and men unmeet to go abroad, and it quickened their blood and the spirits within

them as they heard it, and they smiled and were fain; for they knew that their kinsfolk were glad.

But when there was quiet on the Mote-field again, Folk-might spake again and said;

'It is sooth that my Brother sayeth, and that now again we wend,
All the Sons of the Wolf together, till the trouble hath an end.
But as for that tale of the Ancients, it saith that we who went
To the northward, climbed and stumbled o'er many a stony bent,
Till we hapned on that isle of the waste-land, and the grass of Shadowy Vale,
Where we dwelt till we throve a little, and felt our might avail.
Then we fared abroad from the shadow and the little-lighted hold,
And the increase fell to the valiant, and the spoil to the battle-bold,
And never a man gainsaid us with the weapons in our hands;
And in Silver-dale the happy we gat us life and lands.
'So wore the years o'er-wealthy; and meseemeth that ye know
How we sowed and reaped destruction, and the Day of the overthrow:
How we leaned on the staff we had broken, and put our lives in the hand
Of those whom we had vanquished and the feeble of the land;
And these were the stone of stumbling, and the burden not to be borne,
When the battle-blast fell on us and our day was over-worn.
Thus then did our wealth bewray us, and left us wise and sad;
And to you, bold men, it falleth once more to make us glad,
If so your hearts are bidding, and ye deem the deed of worth.
Such were we; what we shall be, 'tis yours to say henceforth.'

He said furthermore: 'How great we have been I have told you already; and ye shall see for yourselves how little we be now. Is it enough, and will ye have us for friends and brothers? How say ye?'

They answered with shout upon shout, so that all the place and the wild-wood round about was full of the voice of their crying; but when the clamour fell, then spake the Alderman and said:

'Friend, and chieftain of the Wolf, thou mayst hear by this shouting of the people that we have no mind to naysay our yea-say. And know that it is not our use and manner to seek the strong for friends, and to thrust aside the weak; but rather to choose for our friends them who are of like mind to us, men in whom we put our trust. From henceforth then there is brotherhood between us; we are yours, and ye are ours; and let this endure for ever!'

Then were all men full of joy; and now at last the battle seemed at hand, and the peace beyond the battle.

Then men brought the hallowed beasts all garlanded with flowers into the Doom-ring, and there were they slain and offered up unto the Gods, to wit the Warrior, the Earth-god, and the Fathers; and thereafter was solemn feast holden on the Field of the Folk-mote, and all men were fain and merry. Nevertheless, not all men abode there the feast through; for or ever the afternoon was well worn, were many men wending along the Portway eastward toward the Upper Dale, each man in his war-gear and with a scrip hung about him; and these were they who were bound for the trysting-place and the journey over the waste.

So the Folk-mote was sundered; and men went to their houses, and there abode in peace the time of their summoning; since they wotted well that the Hosting was afoot.

But as for the Woodlanders, who were at the Mote-stead with all their folk, women, children, and old men, they went not back again to Carlstead; but prayed the neighbours of the Middle Dale to suffer them to abide there awhile, which they yeasaid with a good will. So the Woodlanders tilted themselves in, the more part of them, down in the meadows below the Mote-stead, along either side of Wildlake's Way; but their ancient folk, and some of the women and children, the neighbours would have into their houses, and the rest they furnished with victual and all that they needed without price, looking upon them as their very guests. For indeed they deemed that they could see that these men would never return to Carlstead, but would abide with the Men of the Wolf in Silver-dale, once it were won. And this they deemed but meet and right, yet were they sorry thereof; for the Woodlanders were well beloved of all the Dalesmen; and now that they had gotten to know that they were come of so noble a kindred, they were better beloved yet, and more looked upon.

CHAPTER XL. OF THE HOSTING IN SHADOWY VALE.

It was on the evening of the fourth day after the Folk-mote that there came through the Waste to the rocky edge of Shadowy Vale a band of some fifteen score of men-at-arms, and with them a multitude of women and children and old men, some afoot, some riding on asses and bullocks; and with them were sumpter asses and neat laden with household goods, and a few

goats and kine. And this was the whole folk of the Woodlanders come to the Hosting in Shadowy Vale and the Home of the Children of the Wolf. Their leaders of the way were Wood-father and Wood-wont and two other carles of Shadowy Vale; and Red-wolf the tall, and Bears-bane and War-grove were the captains and chieftains of their company.

Thus then they entered into the narrow pass aforesaid, which was the ingate to the Vale from the Waste, and little by little its dimness swallowed up their long line. As they went by the place where the lowering of the rock-wall gave a glimpse of the valley, they looked down into it as Face-of-god had done, but much change was there in little time. There was the black wall of crags on the other side stretching down to the ghyll of the great Force; there ran the deep green waters of the Shivering Flood; but the grass which Face-of-god had seen naked of everything but a few kine, thereon now the tents of men stood thick. Their hearts swelled within them as they beheld it, but they forebore the shout and the cry till they should be well within the Vale, and so went down silently into the darkness. But as their eyes caught that dim image of the Wolf on the wall of the pass, man pointed it out to man, and not a few turned and kissed it hurriedly; and to them it seemed that many a kiss had been laid on that dear token since the days of old, and that the hard stone had been worn away by the fervent lips of men, and that the air of the mirk place yet quivered with the vows sworn over the sword-blade.

But down through the dark they went, and so came on to the stony scree at the end of the pass and into the Vale; and the whole Folk save the three chieftains flowed over it and stood about it down on the level grass of the Vale. But those three stood yet on the top of the scree, bearing the war-signs of the Shaft and the Spear, and betwixt them the banner of the Wolf and the Sunburst newly displayed to the winds of Shadowy Vale.

Up and down the Vale they looked, and saw before the tents of men the old familiar banners of Burgdale rising and falling in the evening wind. But amidst of the Doom-ring was pitched a great banner, whereon was done the image of the Wolf with red gaping jaws on a field of green; and about him stood other banners, to wit, The Silver Arm on a red field, the Red Hand on a white field, and on green fields both, the Golden Bushel and the Ragged Sword.

All about the plain shone glittering war-gear of men as they moved hither and thither, and a stream of folk began at once to draw toward the scree to look on those new-comers; and amidst the helmed Burgdalers and the white-coated Shepherds went the tall men of the Wolf, bare-headed and unarmed save for their swords, mingled with the fair strong women of the kindred, treading barefoot the soft grass of their own Vale.

Presently there was a great throng gathered round about the Woodlanders, and each man as he joined it waved hand or weapon toward them, and the joy of their welcome sent a confused clamour through the air. Then forth from the throng stepped Folk-might, unarmed save his sword, and behind him was Face-of-god, in his war-gear save his helm, hand in hand with the Sun-beam, who was clad in her goodly flowered green kirtle, her feet naked like her sisters of the kindred.

Then Folk-might cried aloud: 'A full and free greeting to our brothers! Well be ye, O Sons of our Ancient Fathers! And to-day are ye the dearer to us because we see that ye have brought us a gift, to wit, your wives and children, and your grandsires unmeet for war. By this token we see how great is your trust in us, and that it is your meaning never to sunder from us again. O well be ye; well be ye!'

Then spake Red-wolf, and said: 'Ye Sons of the Wolf, who parted from us of old time in that cleft of the mountains, it is our very selves that we give unto you; and these are a part of ourselves; how then should we leave them behind us? Bear witness, O men of Burgdale and the Sheepcotes, that we have become one Folk with the men of Shadowy Vale, never to be sundered again!'

Then all that multitude shouted with a loud voice; and when the shout had died away, Folk-might spake again:

'O Warriors of the Sundering, here shall your wives and children abide, while we go a little journey to rejoice our hearts with the hard handplay, and take to us that which we have missed: and to-morrow morn is appointed for this same journey, unless ye be over foot-weary with the ways of the Waste.'

Red-wolf smiled as he answered: 'This ye say in jest, brother; for ye may see that our day's journey hath not been over-much for our old men; how then should it weary those who may yet bear sword? We are ready for the road and eager for the handplay.'

'This is well,' said Folk-might, 'and what was to be looked for. Therefore, brother, do ye and your counsel-mates come straightway to the Hall of the Wolf; wherein, after ye have eaten and drunken, shall we take counsel with our brethren of Burgdale and the Sheepcotes, so that all may be ordered for battle!'

Said Red-wolf: 'Good is that, if we must needs abide till to-morrow; for verily we came not hither to eat and drink and rest our bodies; but it must be as ye will have it.'

Then the Sun-beam left the hand of Face-of-god and came forward, and held out both her palms to the Woodland-folk, and spake in a voice that was heard afar, though it were a woman's, so clear and sweet it was; and she said:

'O Warriors of the Sundering, ye who be not needed in the Hall, and ye our sisters with your little ones and your fathers, come now to us and down to the tents which we have arrayed for you, and there think for a little that we are all at our very home that we long for and have yet to win, and be ye merry with us and make us merry.'

Therewith she stepped forward daintily and entered into their throng, and took an old man of the Woodlanders by the hand, and kissed his cheek and led him away, and the coming rest seemed sweet to him. And then came other women of the Vale, kind and fair and smiling, and led away, some an old mother of the Wood-landers, some a young wife, some a pair of lads; and not a few forsooth kissed and embraced the stark warriors, and went away with them toward the tents, which stood along the side of the Shivering Flood where it was at its quietest; for there was the grass the softest and most abundant. There on the green grass were tables arrayed, and lamps were hung above them on spears, to be litten when the daylight should fail. And the best of the victual which the Vale could give was spread on the boards, along with wine and dainties, bought in Silver-dale, or on the edges of the Westland with sword-strokes and arrow-flight.

There then they feasted and were merry; and the Sun-beam and Bow-may and the other women of the Vale served them at table, and were very blithe with them, caressing them with soft words, and with clipping and kissing, as folk who were grown exceeding dear to them; so that that eve of battle was softer and sweeter to them than any hour of their life. With these feasters were God-swain and Spear-fist of the delivered thralls of Silver-dale as glad as glad might be; but Wolf-stone their eldest was gone with Dallach to the Council in the Hall.

The men of Burgdale and the Shepherds feasted elsewhere in all content, nor lacked folk of the Vale to serve them. Amongst the men of the Face were the ten delivered thralls who had heart to meet their masters in arms: seven of them were of Rose-dale and three of Silver-dale.

The Bride was with her kindred of the Steer, with whom were many men of Shadowy Vale, and she served her friends and fellows clad in her war-gear, save helm and hauberk, bearing herself as one who is serving dear guests. And men equalled her for her beauty to the Gods of the High Place and the Choosers of the Slain; and they who had not beheld her before marvelled at her, and her loveliness held all men's hearts in a net of desire, so that they forebore their meat to gaze upon her; and if perchance her hand touched some young man, or her cheek or sweet-breathed mouth came nigh to his face, he became bewildered and wist not where he was, nor what to do. Yet was she as lowly and simple of speech and demeanour as if she were a gooseherd of fourteen winters.

In the Hall was a goodly company, and all the leaders of the Folk were therein, and Folk-might and the War-leader sitting in the midst of those stone seats on the days. There then they agreed on the whole ordering of the battle and the wending of the host, as shall be told later on; and this matter was long a-doing, and when it was done, men went to their places to sleep, for the night was well worn.

But when men had departed and all was still, Folk-might, light-clad and without a weapon, left the Hall and walked briskly toward the nether end of the Vale. He passed by all the tents, the last whereof were of the House of the Steer, and came to a place where was a great rock rising straight up from the plain like sheaves of black staves standing close together; and it was called Staff-stone, and tales of the elves had been told concerning it, so that Stone-face had beheld it gladly the day before.

The moon was just shining into Shadowy Vale, and the grass was bright wheresoever the shadows of the high cliffs were not, and the face of Staff-stone shone bright grey as Folk-might came within sight of it, and he beheld someone sitting at the base of the rock, and as he drew nigher he saw that it was a woman, and knew her for the Bride; for he had prayed her to abide him there that night, because it was nigh to the tents of the House of the Steer; and his heart

was glad as he drew nigh to her.

She sat quietly on a fragment of the black rock, clad as she had been all day, in her glittering kirtle, but without hauberk or helm, a wreath of wind-flowers about her head, her feet crossed over each other, her hands laid palm uppermost in her lap. She moved not as he drew nigh, but said in a gentle voice when he was close to her:

‘Chief of the Wolf, great warrior, thou wouldest speak with me; and good it is that friends should talk together on the eve of battle, when they may never meet alive again.’

He said: ‘My talk shall not be long; for thou and I both must sleep to-night, since there is work to hand to-morrow. Now since, as thou sayest, O fairest of women, we may never meet again alive, I ask thee now at this hour, when we both live and are near to one another, to suffer me to speak to thee of my love of thee and desire for thee. Surely thou, who art the sweetest of all things the Gods and the kindreds have made, wilt not gainsay me this?’

She said very sweetly, yet smiling: ‘Brother of my father’s sons, how can I gainsay thee thy speech? Nay, hast thou not said it? What more canst thou add to it that will have fresh meaning to mine ears?’

He said: ‘Thou sayest sooth: might I then but kiss thine hand?’

She said, no longer smiling: ‘Yea surely, even so may all men do who can be called my friends—and thou art much my friend.’

He took her hand and kissed it, and held it thereafter; nor did she draw it away. The moon shone brightly on them; but by its light he could not see if she reddened, but he deemed that her face was troubled. Then he said: ‘It were better for me if I might kiss thy face, and take thee in mine arms.’

Then said she: ‘This only shall a man do with me when I long to do the like with him. And since thou art so much my friend, I will tell thee that as for this longing, I have it not. Bethink thee what a little while it is since the lack of another man’s love grieved me sorely.’

‘The time is short,’ said Folk-might, ‘if we tell up the hours thereof; but in that short space have a many things betid.’

She said: ‘Dost thou know, canst thou guess, how sorely ashamed I went amongst my people? I durst look no man in the face for the aching of mine heart, which methought all might see through my face.’

‘I knew it well,’ he said; ‘yet of me wert thou not ashamed but a little while ago, when thou didst tell me of thy grief.’

She said: ‘True it is; and thou wert kind to me. Thou didst become a dear friend to me, methought.’

‘And wilt thou hurt a dear friend?’ said he.

‘O no,’ she said, ‘if I might do otherwise. Yet how if I might not choose? Shall there be no forgiveness for me then?’

He answered nothing; and still he held her hand that strove not to be gone from his, and she cast down her eyes. Then he spake in a while:

‘My friend, I have been thinking of thee and of me; and now hearken: if thou wilt declare that thou feelest no sweetness embracing thine heart when I say that I desire thee sorely, as now I say it; or when I kiss thine hand, as now I kiss it; or when I pray thee to suffer me to cast mine arms about thee and kiss thy face, as now I pray it: if thou wilt say this, then will I take thee by the hand straightway, and lead thee to the tents of the House of the Steer, and say farewell to thee till the battle is over. Canst thou say this out of the truth of thine heart?’

She said: ‘What then if I cannot say this word? What then?’

But he answered nothing; and she sat still a little while, and then arose and stood before him, looking him in the eyes, and said:

‘I cannot say it.’

Then he caught her in his arms and strained her to him, and then kissed her lips and her face again and again, and she strove not with him. But at last she said:

‘Yet after all this shalt thou lead me back to my folk straight-way; and when the battle is done, if both we are living, then shall we speak more thereof.’

So he took her hand and led her on toward the tents of the Steer, and for a while he spake nought; for he doubted himself, what he should say; but at last he spake:

‘Now is this better for me than if it had not been, whether I live or whether I die. Yet thou

hast not said that thou lovest me and desirest me.'

'Wilt thou compel me?' she said. 'To-night I may not say it. Who shall say what words my lips shall fashion when we stand together victorious in Silver-dale; then indeed may the time seem long from now.'

He said: 'Yea, true is that; yet once again I say that so measured long and long is the time since first I saw thee in Burgdale before thou knewest me. Yet now I will not bicker with thee, for be sure that I am glad at heart. And lo you! our feet have brought us to the tents of thy people. All good go with thee!'

'And with thee, sweet friend,' she said. Then she lingered a little, turning her head toward the tents, and then turned her face toward him and laid her hand on his neck, and drew his head adown to her and kissed his cheek, and therewith swiftly and lightly departed from him.

Now the night wore and the morning came; and Face-of-god was abroad very early in the morning, as his custom was; and he washed the night from off him in the Carles' Bath of the Shivering Flood, and then went round through the encampment of the host, and saw none stirring save here and there the last watchmen of the night. He spake with one or two of these, and then went up to the head of the Vale, where was the pass that led to Silver-dale; and there he saw the watch, and spake with them, and they told him that none had as yet come forth from the pass, and he bade them to blow the horn of warning to rouse up the Host as soon as the messengers came thence. For forerunners had been sent up the pass, and had been set to hold watch at divers places therein to pass on the word from place to place.

Thence went Face-of-god back toward the Hall; but when he was yet some way from it, he saw a slender glittering warrior come forth from the door thereof, who stood for a moment looking round about, and then came lightly and swiftly toward him; and lo! it was the Sun-beam, with a long hauberk over her kirtle falling below her knees, a helm on her head and plated shoes on her feet. She came up to him, and laid her hand to his cheek and the golden locks of his head (for he was bare-headed), and said to him, smiling:

'Gold-mane! thou badest me bear arms, and Folk-might also constrained me thereto. Lo thou!'

Said Face-of-god: 'Folk-might is wise then, even as I am; and forsooth as thou art. For bethink thee if the bow drawn at a venture should speed the eyeless shaft against thy breast, and send me forth a wanderer from my Folk! For how could I bear the sight of the fair Dale, and no hope to see thee again therein?'

She said: 'The heart is light within me to-day. Deemest thou that this is strange? Or dost thou call to mind that which thou spakest the other day, that it was of no avail to stand in the Doom-ring of the Folk and bear witness against ourselves? This will I not. This is no light-mindedness that thou beholdest in me, but the valiancy that the Fathers have set in mine heart. Deem not, O Gold-mane, fear not, that we shall die before they dight the bride-bed for us.'

He would have kissed her mouth, but she put him away with her hand, and doffed her helm and laid it on the grass, and said:

'This is not the last time that thou shalt kiss me, Gold-mane, my dear; and yet I long for it as if it were, so high as the Fathers have raised me up this morn above fear and sadness.'

He said nought, but drew her to him, and wonder so moved him, that he looked long and closely at her face before he kissed her; and forsooth he could find no blemish in it: it was as if it were but new come from the smithy of the Gods, and exceeding longing took hold of him. But even as their lips met, from the head of the Vale came the voice of the great horn; and it was answered straightway by the watchers all down the tents; and presently arose the shouts of men and the clash of weapons as folk armed themselves, and laughter therewith, for most men were battle-merry, and the cries of women shrilly-clear as they hastened about, busy over the morning meal before the departure of the Host. But Face-of-god said softly, still caressing the Sun-beam, and she him:

'Thus then we depart from this Valley of the Shadows, but as thou saidst when first we met therein, there shall be no sundering of thee and me, but thou shalt go down with me to the battle.'

And he led her by the hand into the Hall of the Wolf, and there they ate a morsel, and thereafter Face-of-god tarried not, but busied himself along with Folk-might and the other chieftains in arraying the Host for departure.

CHAPTER XLI. THE HOST DEPARTETH FROM SHADOWY VALE: THE FIRST DAY'S JOURNEY.

It was about three hours before noon that the Host began to enter into the pass out of Shadowy Vale by the river-side; and the women and children, and men unfightworthy, stood on the higher ground at the foot of the cliffs to see the Host wend on the way. Of these a many were of the Woodlanders, who were now one folk with them of Shadowy Vale. And all these had chosen to abide tidings in the Vale, deeming that there was little danger therein, since that last slaughter which Folk-might had made of the Dusky Men; albeit Face-of-god had offered to send them all to Burgstead with two score and ten men-at-arms to guard them by the way and to eke out the warders of the Burg.

Now the fighting-men of Shadowy Vale were two long hundreds lacking five; of whom two score and ten were women, and three score and ten lads under twenty winters; but the women, though you might scarce see fairer of face and body, were doughty in arms, all good shooters in the bow; and the swains were eager and light-foot, cragsmen of the best, wont to scaling the cliffs of the Vale in search of the nests of gerfalcons and such-like fowl, and swimming the strong streams of the Shivering Flood; tough bodies and wiry, stronger than most grown men, and as fearless as the best.

The order of the Departure of the Host was this:

The Woodlanders went first into the pass, and with them were two score of the ripe Warriors of the Wolf. Then came of the kindreds of Burgdale, the Men of the Steer, the Bridge, and the Bull; then the Men of the Vine and the Sickle; then the Shepherd-folk; and lastly, the Men of the Face led by Stone-face and Hall-face. With these went another two score of the dwellers in Shadowy Vale, and the rest were scattered up and down the bands of the Host to guide them into the best paths and to make the way easier to them. Face-of-god was sundered from his kindred, and went along with Folk-might in the forefront of the Host, while his father the Alderman went as a simple man-at-arms with his House in the rearward. The Sun-beam followed her brother and Face-of-god amidst the Warriors of the Wolf, and with her were Bow-may clad in the Alderman's gift, and Wood-father and his children. Bow-may had caused her to doff her hauberk for that day, whereon they looked to fall in with no foeman. As for the Bride, she went with her kindred in all her war-gear; and the morning sun shone in the gems of her apparel, and her jewelled feet fell like flowers upon the deep grass of the upper Vale, and shone strange and bright amongst the black stones of the pass. She bore a quiver at her back and a shining yew bow in her hand, and went amongst the bowmen, for she was a very deft archer.

So fared they into the pass, leaving peace behind them, with all their banners displayed, and the banner of the Red-mouthed Wolf went with the Wolf and the Sun-burst in the forefront of their battle next after the two captains.

As for their road, the grassy space between the rock-wall and the water was wide and smooth at first, and the cliffs rose up like bundles of spear-shafts high and clear from the green grass with no confused litter of fallen stones; so that the men strode on briskly, their hearts high-raised and full of hope. And as they went, the sweetness of song stirred in their souls, and at last Bow-may fell to singing in a loud clear voice, and her cousin Wood-wise answered her, and all the warriors of the Wolf who were in their band fell into the song at the ending, and the sound of their melody went down the water and reached the ears of those that were entering the pass, and of those who were abiding till the way should be clear of them: and this is some of what they sang:

Bow-may singeth:

Hear ye never a voice come crying
 Out from the waste where the winds fare wide?
 'Sons of the Wolf, the days are dying,
 And where in the clefts of the rocks do ye hide?
 'Into your hands hath the Sword been given,
 Hard are the palms with the kiss of the hilt;
 Through the trackless waste hath the road been riven
 For the blade to seek to the heart of the guilt.
 'And yet ye bide and yet ye tarry;
 Dear deem ye the sleep 'twixt hearth and board,
 And sweet the maiden mouths ye marry,
 And bright the blade of the bloodless sword.'

Wood-wise singeth:

Yea, here we dwell in the arms of our Mother
 The Shadowy Queen, and the hope of the Waste;
 Here first we came, when never another
 Adown the rocky stair made haste.

Far is the foe, and no sword beholdeth
 What deed we work and whither we wend;
 Dear are the days, and the Year enfoldeth
 The love of our life from end to end.

Voice of our Fathers, why will ye move us,
 And call up the sun our swords to behold?
 Why will ye cry on the foeman to prove us?
 Why will ye stir up the heart of the bold?

Bow-may singeth:

Purbblind am I, the voice of the chiding;
 Then tell me what is the thing ye bear?
 What is the gift that your hands are hiding,
 The gold-adorned, the dread and dear?

Wood-wise singeth:

Dark in the sheath lies the Anvil's Brother,
 Hid is the hammered Death of Men.
 Would ye look on the gift of the green-clad Mother?
 How then shall ye ask for a gift again?

The Warriors sing:

Show we the Sunlight the Gift of the Mother,
 As foot follows foot to the foeman's den!
 Gleam Sun, breathe Wind, on the Anvil's Brother,
 For bare is the hammered Death of Men.

Therewith they shook their naked swords in the air, and fared on eagerly, and as swiftly as the pass would have them fare. But so it was, that when the rearward of the Host was entering the first of the pass, and was going on the wide smooth sward, the vanward was gotten to where there was but a narrow space clear betwixt water and cliff; for otherwhere was a litter of great rocks and small, hard to be threaded even by those who knew the passes well; so that men had to tread along the very verge of the Shivering Flood, and wary must they be, for the water ran swift and deep betwixt banks of sheer rock half a fathom below their very foot-soles, which had but bare space to go on the narrow a way. So it held on for a while, and then got safer, and there was more space for going betwixt cliff and flood; albeit it was toilsome enough, since for some way yet there was a drift of stones to cumber their feet, some big and some little, and some very big. After a while the way grew better, though here and there, where the cliffs lowered, were wide screes of loose stones that they must needs climb up and down. Thereafter for a space was there an end of the stony cumber, but the way betwixt the river and the cliffs narrowed again, and the black crags grew higher, and at last so exceeding high, and the way so narrow, that the sky overhead was to them as though they were at the bottom of a well, and men deemed that thence they could see the stars at noontide. For some time withal had the way been mounting up and up, though the cliffs grew higher over it; till at last they were but going on a narrow shelf, the Shivering Flood swirling and rattling far below them betwixt sheer rock-walls grown exceeding high; and above them the cliffs going up towards the heavens as black as a moonless starless night of winter. And as the flood thundered below, so above them roared the ceaseless thunder of the wind of the pass, that blew exceeding fierce down that strait place; so that the skirts of their garments were wrapped about their knees by it, and their feet were well-nigh stayed at whiles as they breasted the push thereof.

But as they mounted higher and higher yet, the noise of the waters swelled into a huge roar that drowned the bellowing of the prisoned wind, and down the pass came drifting a fine rain that fell not from the sky, for between the clouds of that drift could folk see the heavens bright and blue above them. This rain was but the spray of the great force up to whose steps they were climbing.

Now the way got rougher as they mounted; but this toil was caused by their gain; for the rock-wall, which thrust out a buttress there as if it would have gone to the very edge of the gap where-through the flood ran, and so have cut the way off utterly, was here somewhat broken down, and its stones scattered down the steep bent, so that there was a passage, though a toilsome one.

Thus then through the wind-borne drift of the great force, through which men could see the white waters tossing down below, amidst the clattering thunder of the Shivering Flood and the rumble of the wind of the gap, that tore through their garments and hair as if it would rend all to rags and bear it away, the banners of the Wolf won their way to the crest of the midmost height of the pass, and the long line of the Host came clambering after them; and each band of warriors as it reached the top cast an unheard shout from amidst the tangled fury of wind and waters.

A little further on and all that turmoil was behind them; the sun, now grown low, smote the wavering column of spray from the force at their backs, till the rainbows lay bright across it; and the sunshine lay wide over a little valley that sloped somewhat steeply to the west right up from the edge of the river; and beyond these western slopes could men see a low peak spreading down on all sides to the plain, till it was like to a bossed shield, and the name of it was Shield-broad. Dark grey was the valley everywhere, save that by the side of the water was a space of bright green-sward hedged about toward the mountain by a wall of rocks tossed up into wild shapes of spires and jagged points. The river itself was spread out wide and shallow, and went rattling about great grey rocks scattered here and there amidst it, till it gathered itself together to tumble headlong over three slant steps into the mighty gap below.

From the height in the pass those grey slopes seemed easy to traverse; but the warriors of the Wolf knew that it was far otherwise, for they were but the molten rock-sea that in time long past had flowed forth from Shield-broad and filled up the whole valley endlong and overthwart, cooling as it flowed, and the tumbled hedge of rock round about the green plain by the river was where the said rock-sea had been stayed by meeting with soft ground, and had heaped itself up round about the green-sward. And that great rock-flood as it cooled split in divers fashions; and the rain and weather had been busy on it for ages, so that it was worn into a maze of narrow paths, most of which, after a little, brought the wayfarer to a dead stop, or else led him back again to the place whence he had started; so that only those who knew the passes thoroughly could thread that maze without immeasurable labour.

Now when the men of the Host looked from the high place whereon they stood toward the green plain by the river, they saw on the top of that rock-wall a red pennon waving on a spear, and beside it three or four weaponed men gleaming bright in the evening sun; and they waved their swords to the Host, and made lightning of the sunbeams, and the men of the Host waved swords to them in turn. For these were the outguards of the Host; and the place whereon they were was at whiles dwelt in by those who would drive the spoil in Silver-dale, and midmost of the green-sward was a booth builded of rough stones and turf, a refuge for a score of men in rough weather.

So the men of the vanward gat them down the hill, and made the best of their way toward the grassy plain through that rocky maze which had once been as a lake of molten glass; and as short as the way looked from above, it was two hours or ever they came out of it on to the smooth turf, and it was moonlight and night ere the House of the Face had gotten on to the green-sward.

There then the Host abode for that night, and after they had eaten lay down on the green grass and slept as they might. Bow-may would have brought the Sun-beam into the booth with some others of the women, but she would not enter it, because she deemed that otherwise the Bride would abide without; and the Bride, when she came up, along with the House of the Steer, beheld the Sun-beam, that Wood-father's children had made a lair for her without like a hare's form; and forsooth many a time had she lain under the naked heaven in Shadowy Vale and the waste about it, even as the Bride had in the meadows of Burgdale. So when the Bride was bidden thereto, she went meekly into the booth, and lay there with others of the damsels-at-arms.

CHAPTER XLII. THE HOST COMETH TO THE EDGES OF SILVER-DALE.

So wore the night, and when the dawn was come were the two captains afoot, and they went from band to band to see that all was ready, and all men were astir betimes, and by the time that the sun smote the eastern side of Shield-broad ruddy, they had broken their fast and were dight for departure. Then the horns blew up beside the banners, and rejoiced the hearts of men. But by the command of the captains this was the last time that they should sound till they blew for onset in Silver-dale, because now would they be drawing nigher and nigher to the foemen, and they wotted not but that wandering bands of them might be hard on the lips

of the pass, and might hear the horns' voice, and turn to see what was toward.

Forth then went the banners of the Wolf, and the men of the vanward fell to threading the rock-maze toward the north, and in two hours' time were clear of the Dale under Shield-broad. All went in the same order as yesterday; but on this day the Sun-beam would bear her hauberk, and had a sword girt to her side, and her heart was high and her speech merry.

When they left the Dale under Shield-broad the way was easy and wide for a good way, the river flowing betwixt low banks, and the pass being more like a string of little valleys than a mere gap, as it had been on the other side of the Dale. But when one third of the day was past, the way began to narrow on them again, and to rise up little by little; and at last the rock-walls drew close to the river, and when men looked toward the north they saw no way, and nought but a wall. For the gap of the Shivering Flood turned now to the east, and the Flood came down from the east in many falls, as it were over a fearful stair, through a gap where there was no path between the cliffs and the water, nought but the boiling flood and its turmoil; so that they who knew not the road wondered what they should do.

But Folk-might led the banners to where a great buttress of the cliffs thrust itself into the way, coming well-nigh down to the water, just at the corner where the river turned eastward, and they got them about it as they might, and on the other side thereof lo! another gap exceeding strait, scarce twenty foot over, wall-sided, rugged beyond measure, going up steeply from the great valley: a little water ran through it, mostly filling up the floor of it from side to side; but it was but shallow. This was now the battle-road of the Host, and the vanward entered it at once, turning their backs upon the Shivering Flood.

Full toilsome and dreary was that strait way; often great stones hung above their heads, bridging the gap and hiding the sky from them; nor was there any path for them save the stream itself; so that whiles were they wading its waters to the knee or higher, and whiles were they striding from stone to stone amidst the rattle of the waters, and whiles were they stepping warily along the ledges of rock above the deeper pools, and in all wise labouring in overcoming the rugged road amidst the twilight of the gap.

Thus they toiled till the afternoon was well worn, and so at last they came to where the rock-wall was somewhat broken down on the north side, and great rocks had fallen across the gap, and dammed up the waters, which fell scantily over the dam from stone to stone into a pool at the bottom of it. Up this breach, then, below the force they scrambled and struggled, for rough indeed was the road for them; and so came they up out of the gap on to the open hill-side, a great shoulder of the heath sloping down from the north, and littered over with big stones, borne thither belike by some ice-river of the earlier days; and one great rock was in special as great as the hall of a wealthy goodman, and shapen like to a hall with hipped gables, which same the men of the Wolf called House-stone.

There then the noise and clatter of the vanward rose up on the face of the heath, and men were exceeding joyous that they had come so far without mishap. Therewith came weaponed men out from under House-stone, and they came toward the men of the vanward, and they were a half-score of the forerunners of the Wolf; therefore Folk-might and Face-of-god fell at once into speech with them, and had their tidings; and when they had heard them, they saw nought to hinder the host from going on their road to Silver-dale forthright; and there were still three hours of daylight before them. So the vanward of the host tarried not, and the captains left word with the men from under House-stone that the rest of the Host should fare on after them speedily, and that they should give this word to each company, as men came up from out the gap. Then they fared speedily up the hillside, and in an hour's wearing had come to the crest thereof, and to where the ground fell steadily toward the north, and hereabout the scattered stones ceased, and on the other side of the crest the heath began to be soft and boggy, and at last so soft, that if they had not been wisely led, they had been bemired oftentimes. At last they came to where the flows that trickled through the mires drew together into a stream, so that men could see it running; and thereon some of the Woodlanders cried out joyously that the waters were running north; and then all knew that they were drawing nigh to Silver-dale.

No man they met on the road, nor did they of Shadowy Vale look to meet any; because the Dusky Men were not great hunters for the more part, except it were of men, and especially of women; and, moreover, these hill-slopes of the mountain-necks led no-whither and were utterly waste and dreary, and there was nought to be seen there but snipes and bitterns and whimbrel and plover, and here and there a hill-fox, or the great erne hanging over the heath on his way to the mountain.

When sunset came, they were getting clear of the miry ground, and the stream which they had come across amidst of the mires had got clearer and greater, and rattled down between wide stony sides over the heath; and here and there it deepened as it cleft its way through little knolls that rose out of the face of the mountain-neck. As the Host climbed one of these and was come to its topmost (it was low enough not to turn the stream), Face-of-god looked and beheld dark-blue mountains rising up far off before him, and higher than these, but away to the east, the snowy peaks of the World-mountains. Then he called to mind what he had seen from the Burg of the Runaways, and he took Folk-might by the arm, and pointed toward those far-off mountains.

‘Yea,’ said Folk-might, ‘so it is, War-leader. Silver-dale lieth between us and yonder blue ridges, and it is far nigher to us than to them.’

But the Sun-beam came close to those twain, and took Face-of-god by the hand and said: ‘O Gold-mane, dost thou see?’ and he turned about and beheld her, and saw how her cheeks flamed and her eyes glittered, and he said in a low voice: ‘To-morrow for mirth or silence, for life or death.’

But the whole vanward as they came up stayed to behold the sight of the mountains on the other side of Silver-dale, and the banners of the Folk hung over their heads, moving but little in the soft air of the evening: so went they on their ways.

The sun sank, and dusk came on them as they followed down the stream, and night came, and was clear and starlit, though the moon was not yet risen. Now was the ground firm and the grass sweet and flowery, and wind-worn bushes were scattered round about them, as they began to go down into the ghyll that cleft the wall of Silver-dale, and the night-wind blew in their faces from the very Dale and place of the Battle to be. The path down was steep at first, but the ghyll was wide, and the sides of it no longer straight walls, as in the gaps of their earlier journey, but broken, sloping back, and (as they might see on the morrow) partly of big stones and shaly grit, partly grown over with bushes and rough grass, with here and there a little stream trickling down their sides. As they went, the ghyll widened out, till at last they were in a valley going down to the plain, in places steep, in places flat and smooth, the stream ever rattling down the midst of it, and they on the west side thereof. The vale was well grassed, and oak-trees and ash and holly and hazel grew here and there about it; and at last the Host had before it a wood which filled the vale from side to side, not much tangled with undergrowth, and quite clear of it nigh to the stream-side. Thereinto the vanward entered, but went no long way ere the leaders called a halt and bade pitch the banners, for that there should they abide the daylight. Thus it had been determined at the Council of the Hall of the Wolf; for Folk-might had said: ‘With an Host as great as ours, and mostly of men come into a land of which they know nought at all, an onslaught by night is perilous: yea, and our foes should be over-much scattered, and we should have to wander about seeking them. Let us rather abide in the wood of Wood-dale till the morning, and then display our banners on the hill-side above Silver-dale, so that they may gather together to fall upon us: in no case shall they keep us out of the Dale.’

There then they stayed, and as each company came up to the wood, they were marshalled into their due places, so that they might set the battle in array on the edge of Silver-dale.

CHAPTER XLIII. FACE-OF-GOD LOOKETH ON SILVER-DALE: THE BOWMEN’S BATTLE.

There then they rested, as folk wearied with the toilsome journey, when they had set sure watches round about their campment; and they ate quietly what meat they had with them, and so gat them to sleep in the wood on the eve of battle.

But not all slept; for the two captains went about amongst the companies, Folk-might to the east, Face-of-god to the west, to look to the watches, and to see that all was ordered duly. Also the Sun-beam slept not, but she lay beside Bow-may at the foot of an oak-tree; she watched Face-of-god as he went away amidst the men of the Host, and watched and waked abiding his returning footsteps.

The night was well worn by then he came back to his place in the vanward, and on his way back he passed through the folk of the Steer laid along on the grass, all save those of the watch, and the light of the moon high aloft was mingled with the light of the earliest dawn; and as it happened he looked down, and lo! close to his feet the face of the Bride as she lay beside her grand-sire, her head pillowed on a bundle of bracken. She was sleeping soundly like a child

who has been playing all day, and whose sleep has come to him unsought and happily. Her hands were laid together by her side; her cheek was as fair and clear as it was wont to be at her best; her face looked calm and happy, and a lock of her dark-red hair strayed from her uncovered head over her breast and lay across her wrists, so peacefully she slept.

Face-of-god turned his eyes from her at once, and went by swiftly, and came to his own company. The Sun-beam saw him coming, and rose straightway to her feet from beside Bow-may, who lay fast asleep, and she held out her hands to him; and he took them and kissed them, and he cast his arms about her and kissed her mouth and her face, and she his in likewise; and she said:

‘O Gold-mane, if this were but the morrow of to-morrow! Yet shall all be well; shall it not?’

Her voice was low, but it waked Bow-may, who sat up at once broad awake, after the manner of a hunter of the waste ever ready for the next thing to betide, and moreover the Sun-beam had been in her thoughts these two days, and she feared for her, lest she should be slain or maimed. Now she smiled on the Sun-beam and said:

‘What is it? Does thy mind forebode evil? That needeth not. I tell thee it is not so ill for us of the sword to be in Silver-dale. Thrice have I been there since the Overthrow, and never more than a half-score in company, and yet am I whole to-day.’

‘Yea, sister,’ said Face-of-god, ‘but in past times ye did your deed and then fled away; but now we come to abide here, and this night is the last of lurking.’

‘Ah,’ she said, ‘a little way from this I saw such things that we had good will to abide here longer, few as we were, but that we feared to be taken alive.’

‘What things were these?’ said Face-of-god.

‘Nay,’ she said, ‘I will not tell thee now; but mayhap in the lighted winter feast-hall, when the kindred are so nigh us and about us that they seem to us as if they were all the world, I may tell it thee; or mayhap I never shall.’

Said the Sun-beam, smiling: ‘Thou wilt ever be talking, Bow-may. Now let the War-leader depart, for he will have much to do.’

And she was well at ease that she had seen Face-of-god again; but he said:

‘Nay, not so much; all is well-nigh done; in an hour it will be broad day, and two hours thereafter shall the Banner be displayed on the edge of Silver-dale.’

The cheek of the Sun-beam flushed, and paled again, as she said: ‘Yea, we shall stand even as our Fathers stood on the day when, coming from off the waste, they beheld it, and knew it would be theirs. Ah me! how have I longed for this morn. But now—Tell me, Gold-mane, dost thou deem that I am afraid? And I whom thou hast deemed to be a God.’

Quoth Bow-may: ‘Thou shalt deem her twice a God ere noon-tide, brother Gold-mane. But come now! the hour of deadly battle is at hand, and we may not laugh that away; and therefore I bid thee remember, Gold-mane, how thou didst promise to kiss me once more on the verge of deadly battle.’

Therewith she stood up before him, and he tarried not, but kind and smiling took her face between his two hands and kissed her lips, and she cast her arms about him and kissed him, and then sank down on the grass again, and turned from him, and laid her face amongst the grass and the bracken, and they could see that she was weeping, and her body was shaken with sobs. But the Sun-beam knelt down to her, and caressed her with her hand, and spake kind words to her softly, while Face-of-god went his ways to meet Folk-might.

Now was the dawn fading into full daylight; and between dawn and sunrise were all men stirring; for the watch had waked the hundred-leaders, and they the leaders of scores and half-scores, and they the whole folk; and they sat quietly in the wood and made no noise.

In the night the watch of the Sickle had fallen in with a thrall who had stolen up from the Dale to set gins for hares, and now in the early morning they brought him to the War-leader. He was even such a man as those with whom Face-of-god had fallen in before, neither better nor worse than most of them: he was sore afraid at first, but by then he was come to the captains he understood that he had happened upon friends; but he was dull of comprehension and slow of speech. Albeit Folk-might gathered from him that the Dusky Men had some inkling of the onslaught; for he said that they had been gathering together in the marketplace of Silver-stead, and would do so again soon. Moreover, the captains deemed from his speech that those new tribes had come to hand sooner than was looked for, and were even now in the Dale. Folk-might smiled as one who is not best pleased when he heard these tidings;

but Face-of-god was glad to hear thereof; for what he loathed most was that the war should drag out in hunting of scattered bands of the foe. Herewith came Dallach to them as they talked (for Face-of-god had sent for him), and he fell to questioning the man further; by whose answers it seemed that many men also had come into the Dale from Rose-dale, so that they of the kindreds were like to have their hands full. Lastly Dallach drew from the thrall that it was on that very morning that the great Folk-mote of the Dusky Men should be holden in the market-place of the Stead, which was right great, and about it were the biggest of the houses wherein the men of the kindred had once dwelt.

So when they had made an end of questioning the thrall, and had given him meat and drink, they asked him if he would take weapons in his hand and lead them on the ways into the Dale, bidding him look about the wood and note how great and mighty an host they were. And the carle yeasaid this, after staring about him a while, and they gave him spear and shield, and he went with the vanward as a way-leader.

Again presently came a watch of the Shepherds, and they had found a man and a woman dead and stark naked hanging to the boughs of a great oak-tree deep in the wood. This men knew for some vengeance of the Dusky Men, for it was clear to see that these poor people had been sorely tormented before they were slain. Also the same watch had stumbled on the dead body of an old woman, clad in rags, lying amongst the rank grass about a little flow; she was exceeding lean and hunger-starved, and in her hand was a frog which she had half eaten. And Dallach, when he heard of this, said that it was the wont of the Dusky Men to slay their thralls when they were past work, or to drive them into the wilderness to die.

Lastly came a watch from the men of the Face, having with them two more thralls, lusty young men; these they had come upon in company of their master, who had brought them up into the wood to shoot him a buck, and therefore they bare bows and arrows. The watch had slain the master straightway while the thralls stood looking on. They were much afraid of the weaponed men, but answered to the questioning much readier than the first man; for they were household thralls, and better fed and clad than he, who was but a toiler in the fields. They yeasaid all his tale, and said moreover that the Folk-mote of the Dusky Men should be holden in the market-place that forenoon, and that most of the warriors should be there, both the new-comers and the Rose-dale lords, and that without doubt they should be under arms.

To these men also they gave a good sword and a helm each, and bade them be brisk with their bows, and they said yea to marching with the Host; and indeed they feared nothing so much as being left behind; for if they fell into the hands of the Dusky Men, and their master missing, they should first be questioned with torments, and then slain in the evillest manner.

Now whereas things had thus betid, and that they knew thus much of their foemen, Face-of-god called all the chieftains together, and they sat on the green grass and held counsel amongst them, and to one and all it seemed good that they should suffer the Dusky Men to gather together before they meddled with them, and then fall upon them in such order and such time as should seem good to the captains watching how things went; and this would be easy, whereas they were all lying in the wood in the same order as they would stand in battle-array if they were all drawn up together on the brow of the hill. Albeit Face-of-god deemed it good, after he had heard all that they who had been in the Stead could tell him thereof, that the Shepherd-Folk, who were more than three long hundreds, and they of the Steer, the Bridge, and the Bull, four hundreds in all, should take their places eastward of the Woodlanders who had led the vanward.

Straightway the word was borne to these men, and the shift was made: so that presently the Woodlanders were amidmost of the Host, and had with them on their right hands the Men of the Steer, the Bridge, and the Bull, and beyond them the Shepherd-Folk. But on their left hand lay the Men of the Vine, then they of the Sickle, and lastly the Men of the Face, and these three kindreds were over five hundreds of warriors: as for the Men of the Wolf, they abode at first with those companies which they had led through the wastes, though this was changed afterwards.

All this being done, Face-of-god gave out that all men should break their fast in peace and leisure; and while men were at their meat, Folk-might spake to Face-of-god and said: 'Come, brother, for I would show thee a goodly thing; and thou, Dallach, come with us.'

Then he brought them by paths in the wood till Face-of-god saw the sky shine white between the tree-boles, and in a little while they were come well-nigh out of the thicket, and then they went warily; for before them was nought but the slopes of Wood-dale, going down steeply

into Silver-dale, with nought to hinder the sight of it, save here and there bushes or scattered trees; and so fair and lovely it was that Face-of-god could scarce forbear to cry out. He saw that it was only at the upper or eastern end, where the mountains of the Waste went round about it, that the Dale was narrow; it soon widened out toward the west, and for the most part was encompassed by no such straight-sided a wall as was Burgdale, but by sloping hills and bents, mostly indeed somewhat higher and steeper than the pass wherein they were, but such as men could well climb if they had a mind to, and there were any end to their journey. The Dale went due west a good way, and then winded about to the southwest, and so was hidden from them thereaway by the bents that lay on their left hand. As it was wider, so it was not so plain a ground as was Burgdale, but rose in knolls and little hills here and there. A river greater than the Weltering Water wound about amongst the said mounds; and along the side of it out in the open dale were many goodly houses and homesteads of stone. The knolls were mostly covered over with vines, and there were goodly and great trees in groves and clumps, chiefly oak and sweet chestnut and linden; many were the orchards, now in blossom, about the homesteads; the pastures of the neat and horses spread out bright green up from the water-side, and deeper green showed the acres of the wheat on the lower slopes of the knolls, and in wide fields away from the river.

Just below the pitch of the hill whereon they were, lay Silver-stead, the town of the Dale. Hitherto it had been an unfenced place; but Folk-might pointed to where on the western side a new white wall was rising, and on which, young as the day yet was, men were busy laying the stones and spreading the mortar. Fair seemed that town to Face-of-god: the houses were all builded of stone, and some of the biggest were roofed with lead, which also as well as silver was dug out of the mountains at the eastern end of the Dale. The market-place was clear to see from where they stood, though there were houses on all sides of it, so wide it was. From their standing-place it was but three furlongs to this heart of Silver-dale; and Face-of-god could see brightly-clad men moving about in it already. High above their heads he beheld two great clots of scarlet and yellow raised on poles and pitched in front of a great stone-built hall roofed with lead, which stood amidmost of the west end of the Place, and betwixt those poles he saw on a mound with long slopes at its sides somewhat of white stone, and amidmost of the whole Place a great stack of faggot-wood built up four-square. Those red and yellow things on the poles he deemed would be the banners of the murder-carles; and Folk-might told him that even so it was, and that they were but big bunches of strips of woollen cloth, much like to great ragmops, save that the rags were larger and longer: no other token of war, said Folk-might, did those folk carry, save a crookbladed sword, smeared with man's blood, and bigger than any man might wield in battle.

'Art thou far-seeing, War-leader?' quoth he. 'What canst thou see in the market-place?'

Said Face-of-god: 'Far-seeing am I above most men, and I see in the Place a man in scarlet standing by the banner, which is pitched in front of the great stone hall, near to the mound with the white stone on it; and meseemeth he beareth a great horn in his hand.'

Said Folk-might: 'Yea, and that stone hall was our Mote-house when we were lords of the Dale, and thence it was that they who are now thralls of the Dusky Men sent to them their message and token of yielding. And as for that white stone, it is the altar of their god; for they have but one, and he is that same crook-bladed sword. And now that I look, I see a great stack of wood amidmost the market-place, and well I know what that betokeneth.'

'Lo you!' said Face-of-god, 'the man with the horn is gone up on to the altar-mound, and meseemeth he is setting the little end of the horn to his mouth.'

'Hearken then!' said Folk-might. And in a moment came the hoarse tuneless sound of the horn down the wind towards them; and Folk-might said:

'I deem I should know what that blast meaneth; and now is it time that the Host drew nigher to set them in array behind these very trees. But if ye will, War-leader, we will abide here and watch the ways of the foemen, and send Dallach with the word to the Host; also I would have thee suffer me to bid hither at once two score and ten of the best of the bowmen of our folk and the Woodlanders, and Wood-wise to lead them, for he knoweth well the land hereabout, and what is good to do.'

'It is good,' said Face-of-god. 'Be speedy, Dallach!'

So Dallach departed, running lightly, and the two chiefs abode there; and the horn in Silver-stead blew at whiles for a little, and then stayed; and Folk-might said:

'Lo you! they come flockmeal to the Mote-stead; the Place will be filled ere long.'

Said Face-of-god: 'Will they make offerings to their god at the hallowing in of their Folk-mote? Where then are the slaughter-beasts?'

'They shall not long be lacking,' said Folk-might. 'See you it is getting thronged about the altar and the Mote-house.'

Now there were four ways into the Market-place of Silver-stead turned toward the four airts, and the midmost of the kindreds' battle looked right down the southern one, which went up to the wood, but stopped there in a mere woodland path, and the more part of the town lay north and west of this way, albeit there was a way from the east also. But the hill-side just below the two captains lay two furlongs west of this southern way; and it went down softly till it was gotten quite near to the backs of the houses on the south side of the Market-place, and was sprinkled scantily with bushes and trees as aforesaid; but at last were there more bushes, which well-nigh made a hedge across it, reaching from the side of the southern way; and a foot or two beyond these bushes the ground fell by a steep and broken bent down to the level of the Market-place, and betwixt that fringe of bushes and the backs of the houses on the south side of the Place was less it maybe than a full furlong: but the southern road aforesaid went down softly into the Market-place, since it had been fashioned so by men.

Now the two chiefs heard a loud blast of horns come up from the town, and lo! a great crowd of men wending their ways down the road from the north, and they came into the market-place with spears and other weapons tossing in the air, and amidst of these men, who seemed to be all of the warriors, they saw as they drew nigher some two score and ten of men clad in long raiment of yellow and scarlet, with tall spiring hats of strange fashion on their heads, and in their hands long staves with great blades like scythes done on to them; and again, in the midst of these yellow and red glaive-bearers, in the very heart of the throng were some score of naked folk, they deemed both men and women, but were not sure, so close was the throng; nor could they see if they were utterly naked.

'Lo you, brother!' quoth Folk-might, 'said I not that the beasts for the hewing should not tarry? Yonder naked folk are even they: and ye may well deem that they are the thralls of the Dusky Men; and meseemeth by the whiteness of their skins they be of the best of them. For these felons, it is like, look to winning great plenty of thralls in Burgdale, and so set the less store on them they have, and may expend them freely.'

As he spake they heard the sound of men marching in the wood behind them, and they turned about and saw that there was come Wood-wise, and with him upwards of two score and ten of the bowmen of the Woodlanders and the Wolf—huntsmen, cragsmen, and scourers of the Waste; men who could shoot the chaffinch on the twig a hundred yards aloof; who could make a hiding-place of the bennets of the wayside grass, or the stem of the slender birch-tree. With these must needs be Bow-may, who was the closest shooter of all the kindreds.

So then Wood-wise told the War-leader that Dallach had given the word to the Host, and that all men were astir and would be there presently in their ordered companies; and Face-of-god spake to Folk-might, and said: 'Chief of the Wolf, wilt thou not give command to these bowmen, and set them to the work; for thou wottest thereof.'

'Yea, that will I,' said Folk-might, and turned to Wood-wise, and said: 'Wood-wise, get ye down the slope, and loose on these felons, who have a murder on hand, if so be ye have a chance to do it wisely. But in any case come ye all back; for all shall be needed yet to-day. So flee if they pursue, for ye shall have us to flee to. Now be ye wary, nor let the curse of the Wolf and the Face lie on your slothfulness.'

Wood-wise did but nod his head and lift his hand to his fellows, who set off after him down the slope without more tarrying. They went very warily, as if they were hunting a quarry which would flee from them; and they crept amongst the grass and stones from bush to bush like serpents, and so, unseen by the Dusky Men, who indeed were busied over their own matters, they came to the fringe of bushes above the broken ground aforesaid, and there they took their stand, and before them below those steep banks was but the space at the back of the houses. As to the houses, as aforesaid, they were not so high as elsewhere about the Market-place; and at the end of a long low hall there was a gap between its gable and the next house, whereby they had a clear sight of the Place about the god's altar and the banners, and the great hall of Silver-dale, with the double stair that went up to the door thereof.

There then they made them ready, and Wood-wise set men to watch that none should come sidelong on them unawares; their bows were bent and their quivers open, and they were eager for the fray.

Thus they beheld the Market-place from their cover, and saw that those folk who were to be hewn to the god were now standing facing the altar in a half-ring, and behind them in another half-ring the glaive-bearers who had brought them thither stood glaive in hand ready to hew them down when the token should be given; and these were indeed the priests of the god.

There was clear space round about these poor slaughter-thralls, so that the bowmen could see them well, and they told up a score of them, half men, half women, and they were all stark naked save for wreaths of flowers about their middles and their necks; and they had shackles of lead about their wrists; which same lead should be taken out of the fire wherein they should be burned, and from the shape it should take after it had passed through the fire would the priests foretell the luck of the deed to be done.

It was clear to be seen from thence that Folk-might was right when he said that these slaughter-thralls were of the best of the house-thralls and bed-mates of the Dusky Men, and that these felons were open-handed to their god, and would not cheat him, or withhold from him the best and most delicate of all they had.

Now spake Wood-wise to those about him: 'It is sure that Folk-might would have us give these poor thralls a chance, and that we must loose upon the felons who would hew them down; and if we are to come back again, we can go no nigher. What sayest thou, Bow-may? Is it nigh enough? Can aught be done?'

'Yea, yea,' she said, 'nigh enough it is; but let Gold-ring be with me and half a score of the very best, whether they be of our folk or the Woodlanders, men who cannot miss such a mark; and when we have loosed, then let all loose, and stay not till our shot be spent. Haste, now haste! time presseth; for if the Host showeth on the brow of the hill, these felons will hew down their slaughter-beasts before they turn on their foemen. Let the grey-goose wing speed trouble and confusion amongst them.'

But ere she had done her words Wood-wise had got to speaking quietly with the Woodlanders; and Bears-bane, who was amidst them, chose out eight of the best of his folk, men who doubted nothing of hitting whatever they could see in the Market-place; and they took their stand for shooting, and with them besides Bow-may were two women and four men of the Wolf, and Gold-ring withal, a carle of fifty winters, long, lean, and wiry, a fell shooter if ever anyone were.

So all these notched their shafts and laid them on the yew, and each had between the two last fingers of the shaft-hand another shaft ready, and a half score more stuck into the ground before him.

Now giveth Wood-wise the word to these sixteen as to which of the felons with the glaives they shall each one aim at; and he saith withal in a soft voice: 'Help cometh from the Hill; soon shall battle be joined in Silver-dale.'

Thus stand they watching Bow-may and Gold-ring till they draw home the notches; and amidst their waiting the glaive-bearing felons fall a-singing a harsh and ugly hymn to their crooked-sword god, and the Market-stead is thronged endlong and overthwart with the tribes of the Dusky Men.

There now standeth Bow-may far-sighted and keen-eyed, her face as pale as a linen sleeve, an awful smile on her glittering eyes and close-set lips, and she feeling the twisted string of the red yew and the polished sides of the notch, while the yelling song of the Dusky priests quavers now and ends with a wild shrill cry, and she noteth the midmost of the priests beginning to handle his weapon: then swift and steady she draweth home the notches, while the yew bow standeth still as the oak-bole ere the summer storm ariseth, and the twang of the sixteen strings maketh but one fell sound as the feathered bane of men goeth on its way.

There was silence for a moment of time in the Market of Silver-stead, as if the bolt of the Gods had fallen there; and then arose a huge wordless yell from those about the altar, and one of the priests who was left hove up his glaive two-handed to smite the naked slaughter-thralls; but ere the stroke fell, Bow-may's second shaft was through his throat, and he rolled over amidst his dead fellows; and the other fifteen had loosed with her, and then even as they could Wood-wise and the others of their company; and all they notched and loosed without tarrying, and no shout, no word came from their lips, only the twanging strings spake for them; for they deemed the minutes that hurried by were worth much joy of their lives to be. And few indeed were the passing minutes ere the dead men lay in heaps about the Altar of the Crooked Sword, and the wounded men wallowed amidst them.

CHAPTER XLIV. OF THE ONSLAUGHT OF THE MEN OF THE STEER, THE BRIDGE, AND THE BULL.

Wild was the turmoil and confusion in the Market-stead; for the more part of the men therein knew not what had befallen about the altar, though some clomb up to the top of that stack of faggots built for the burning of the thralls, and when they saw what was toward fell to yelling and cursing; and their fellows on the plain Place could not hear their story for the clamour, and they also fell to howling as if a wood full of wild dogs was there.

And still the shafts rained down on that throng from the Bent of the Bowmen, for another two score men of the Woodlanders had crept down the hill to them, and shafts failed them not. But the Dusky Men about the altar, for all their terror, or even maybe because of it, now began to turn upon the scarce-seen foemen, and to press up wildly toward the hill-side, though as it were without any order or aim. Every man of them had his weapons, and those no mere gilded toys, but their very tools of battle; and some, but no great number, had their bows with them and a few shafts; and these began to shoot at whatsoever they could see on the hill-side, but at first so wildly and hurriedly that they did no harm.

It must be said of them that at first only those about the altar fell on toward the hill; for those about the road that led southward knew not what had betided nor whither to turn. So that at this beginning of the battle, of all the thousands in the great Place it was but a few hundreds that set on the Bent of the Bowmen, and at these the bowmen of the kindreds shot so close and so wholly together that they fell one over another in the narrow ways between the houses whereby they must needs go to gather on the plain ground betwixt the backs of the houses and the break of the hill-side. But little by little the archers of the Dusky Men gathered behind the corpses of the slain, and fell to shooting at what they could see of the men of the kindreds, which at that while was not much, for as bold as they were, they fought like wary hunters of the Wood and the Waste.

But now at last throughout all that throng of Felons in the Market-place the tale began to spread of foemen come into the Dale and shooting from the Bents, and all they turned their faces to the hill, and the whole set of the throng was thitherward; though they fared but slowly, so evil was the order of them, each man hindering his neighbour as he went. And not only did the Dusky Men come flockmeal toward the Bent of the Bowmen, but also they jostled along toward the road that led southward. That beheld Wood-wise from the Bent, and he was minded to get him and his aback, now that they had made so great a slaughter of the foemen; and two or three of his fellows had been hurt by arrows, and Bow-may, she would have been slain thrice over but for the hammer-work of the Alderman. And no marvel was that; for now she stood on a little mound not half covered by a thin thorn-bush, and notched and loosed at whatever was most notable, as though she were shooting at the mark on a summer evening in Shadowy Vale. But as Wood-wise was at point to give the word to depart, from behind them rang out the merry sound of the Burgdale horns, and he turned to look at the wood-side, and lo! thereunder was the hill bright and dark with men-at-arms, and over them floated the Banners of the Wolf, and the Banners of the Steer, the Bridge, and the Bull. Then gave forth the bowmen of the kindreds their first shout, and they made no stay in their shooting; but shot the eagerer, for they deemed that help would come without their turning about to draw it to them: and even so it was. For straightway down the bent came striding Face-of-god betwixt the two Banners of the Wolf, and beside him were Red-wolf the tall and War-grove, and therewithal Wood-wont and Wood-wicked, and many other men of the Wolf; for now that the men of the kindreds had been brought face to face with the foe, and there was less need of them for way-leaders, the more part of them were liefer to fight under their own banner along with the Woodlanders; so that the company of those who went under the Wolves was more than three long hundreds and a half; and the bowmen on the edge of the bent shouted again and merrily, when they felt that their brothers were amongst them, and presently was the arrow-storm at its fiercest, and the twanging of bow-strings and the whistle of the shafts was as the wind among the clefts of the mountains; for all the new-comers were bowmen of the best.

But the kindreds of the Steer, the Bridge, and the Bull, they hung yet a while longer on the hills' brow, their banners floating over them and their horns blowing; and the Dusky Felons in the Market-place beheld them, and fear and rage at once filled their hearts, and a fierce and dreadful yell brake out from them, and joyously did the Men of Burgdale answer them, and song arose amongst them even such as this:

The Men of the Bridge sing:

Why stand ye together, why bear ye the shield,
Now the calf straineth tether at edge of the field?
Now the lamb bleateth stronger and waters run clear,
And the day groweth longer and glad is the year?
Now the mead-flowers jostle so thick as they stand,
And singeth the throstle all over the land?

The Men of the Steer sing:

No cloud the day darkened, no thunder we heard,
But the horns' speech we hearkened as men unafraid.
Yea, so merry it sounded, we turned from the Dale,
Where all wealth abounded, to wot of its tale.

The Men of the Bridge sing:

What white boles then bear ye, what wealth of the woods?
What chaffers hear ye bid loud for your goods?

The Men of the Bull sing:

O the bright beams we carry are stems of the steel;
Nor long shall we tarry across them to deal.
Hark the men of the cheaping, how loudly they cry
On the hook for the reaping of men doomed to die!

They all sing:

Heave spear up! fare forward, O Men of the Dale!
For the Warrior, our war-ward, shall hearken the tale.

Therewith they ceased a moment, and then gave a great and hearty shout all together, and all their horns blew, and they moved on down the hill as one man, slowly and with no jostling, the spear-men first, and then they of the axe and the sword; and on their flanks the deft archers loosed on the stumbling jostling throng of the Dusky Men, who for their part came on drifting and surging up the road to the hill.

But when those big spearmen of the Dale had gone a little way the horns' voice died out, and their great-staved spears rose up from their shoulders into the air, and stood so a moment, and then slowly fell forward, as the oars of the longship fall into the row-locks, and then over the shoulders of the foremost men showed the steel of the five ranks behind them, and their own spears cast long bars of shadow on the whiteness of the sunny road. No sound came from them now save the rattle of their armour and the tramp of their steady feet; but from the Dusky Men rose up hideous confused yelling, and those that could free themselves from the tangle of the throng rushed desperately against the on-rolling hedge of steel, and the whole throng shoved on behind them. Then met steel and men; here and there an ash-stave broke; here and there a Dusky Felon rolled himself unhurt under the ash-staves, and hewed the knees of the Dalesmen, and a tall man came tottering down; but what men or wood-wights could endure the push of spears of those mighty husbandmen? The Dusky Ones shrunk back yelling, or turned their backs and rushed at their own folk with such fierce agony that they entered into the throng, till the terror of the spear reached to the midmost of it and swayed them back on the hindermost; for neither was there outgate for the felons on the flanks of the spearmen, since there the feathered death beset them, and the bowmen (and the Bride amongst the foremost) shot wholly together, and no shaft flew idly. But the wise leaders of the Dalesmen would not that they should thrust in too far amongst the howling throng of the Dusky Men, lest they should be hemmed in by them; for they were but a handful in regard to them: so there they stayed, barring the way to the Dusky Men, and the bowmen still loosed from the flanks of them, or aimed deftly from betwixt the ranks of the spearmen.

And now was there a space of ten strides or more betwixt the Dalesmen and their foes, over which the spears hung terribly, nor durst the Dusky Men adventure there; and thereon was nought but men dead or sorely hurt. Then suddenly a horn rang thrice shrilly over all the noise and clamour of the throng, and the ranks of the spearmen opened, and forth into that space strode two score of the swordsmen and axe-wielders of the Dale, their weapons raised in their hands, and he who led them was Iron-hand of the House of the Bull: tall he was, wide-shouldered, exceeding strong, but beardless and fair-faced. He bore aloft a two-edged sword, broad-bladed, exceeding heavy, so that few men could wield it in battle, but not right long; it was an ancient weapon, and his father before him had called it the Barley-scythe. With him

were some of the best of the kindreds, as Wolf of Whitegarth, Long-hand of Oakholt, Hart of Highcliff, and War-well the captain of the Bridge. These made no tarrying on that space of the dead, but cried aloud their cries: 'For the Burg and the Steer! for the Dale and the Bridge! for the Dale and the Bull!' and so fell at once on the Felons; who fled not, nor had room to flee; and also they feared not the edge-weapons so sorely as they feared those huge spears. So they turned fiercely on the swordsmen, and chiefly on Iron-hand, as he entered in amongst them the first of all, hewing to the right hand and the left, and many a man fell before the Barley-scythe; for they were but little before him. Yet as one fell another took his place, and hewed at him with the steel axe and the crooked sword; and with many strokes they clave his shield and brake his helm and rent his byrny, while he heeded little save smiting with the Barley-scythe, and the blood ran from his arm and his shoulder and his thigh.

But War-well had entered in among the foe on his left hand, and unshielded hove up a great broad-bladed axe, that clave the iron helms of the Dusky Men, and rent their horn-scaled byrnies. He was not very tall, but his shoulders were huge and his arms long, and nought could abide his stroke. He cleared a ring round Iron-hand, whose eyes were growing dim as the blood flowed from him, and hewed three strokes before him; then turned and drew the champion out of the throng, and gave him into the arms of his fellows to stanch the blood that drained away the might of his limbs; and then with a great wordless roar leaped back again on the Dusky Men as the lion leapeth on the herd of swine; and they shrank away before him; and all the swordsmen shouted, 'For the Bridge, for the Bridge!' and pressed on the harder, smiting down all before them. On his left hand now was Hart of Highcliff wielding a good sword hight Chip-driver, wherewith he had slain and hurt a many, fighting wisely with sword and shield, and driving the point home through the joints of the armour. But even therewith, as he drave a great stroke at a lord of the Dusky Ones, a cast-spear came flying and smote him on the breast, so that he staggered, and the stroke fell flatlings on the shield-boss of his foe, and Chip-driver brake atwain nigh the hilts; but Hart closed with him, and smote him on the face with the pommel, and tore his axe from his hand and clave his skull therewith, and slew him with his own weapon, and fought on valiantly beside War-well.

Now War-well had fought so fiercely that he had rent his own hauberk with the might of his strokes, and as he raised his arm to smite a huge stroke, a deft man of the Felons thrust the spike of his war-axe up under his arm; and when War-well felt the smart of the steel, he turned on that man, and, letting his axe fall down to his wrist and hang there by its loop, he caught the foeman up by the neck and the breech, and drave him against the other Dusky Ones before him, so that their weapons pierced and rent their own friend and fellow. Then he put forth the might of his arms and the pith of his body, and hove up that felon and cast him on to the heads of his fellow murder-carles, so that he rent them and was rent by them. Then War-well fell on again with the axe, and all the champions of the Dale shouted and fell on with him, and the foe shrank away; and the Dalesmen cleared a space five fathoms' length before them, and the spearmen drew onward and stood on the space whereon the first onslaught had been.

Then drew those hewers of the Dale together, and forth from the company came the man that bare the Banner of the Bridget and the champions gathered round him, and they ordered their ranks and strode with the Banner before them three times to and fro across the road athwart the front of the spearmen, and then with a great shout drew back within the spear-hedge. Albeit five of the champions of the Dale had been slain outright there, and the more part of them hurt more or less.

But when all were well within the ranks, once again blew the horn, and all the spears sank to the rest, and the kindreds drave the spear-furrow, and a space was swept clear before them, and the cries and yells of the Dusky Men were so fierce and wild that the rough voices of the Dalesmen were drowned amidst them.

Forth then came every bowman of the kindred that was there and loosed on the Dusky Men; and they forsooth had some bowmen amongst them, but cooped up and jostled as they were they shot but wildly; whereas each shaft of the Dale went home truly.

But amongst the bowmen forth came the Bride in her glittering war-gear, and stepped lightly to the front of the spearmen. Her own yew bow had been smitten by a shaft and broken in her hand: so she had caught up a short horn bow and a quiver from one of the slain of the Dusky Men; and now she knelt on one knee under the shadow of the spears nigh to her grandsire Hall-ward, and with a pale face and knitted brow notched and loosed, and notched and loosed on the throng of foemen, as if she were some daintily fashioned engine of war.

So fared the battle on the road that went from the south into the Market-stead. Valiantly had the kindred fought there, and no man of them had blenched, and much had they won; but the way was perilous before them, for the foe was many and many.

CHAPTER XLV. OF FACE-OF-GOD'S ONSLAUGHT.

Now the banners of the Wolf flapped and rippled over the heads of the Woodlanders and the Men of the Wolf; and the men shot all they might, nor took heed now to cover themselves against the shafts of the Dusky Men. As for these, for all they were so many, their arrow-shot was no great matter, for they were in very evil order, as has been said; and moreover, their rage was so great to come to handy strokes with these foemen, that some of them flung away their bows to brandish the axe or the sword. Nevertheless were some among the kindred hurt or slain by their arrows.

Now stood Face-of-god with the foremost; and from where he stood he could see somewhat of the battle of the Dalesmen, and he wotted that it was thriving; therefore he looked before him and close around him, and noted what was toward there. The space betwixt the houses and the break of the bent was crowded with the fury of the Dusky Men tossing their weapons aloft, crying to each other and at the kindred, and here and there loosing a bow-string on them; but whatever was their rage they might not come a many together past a line within ten fathom of the bent's end; for three hundred of the best of bowmen were shooting at them so ceaselessly that no Dusky man was safe of any bare place of his body, and they fell over one another in that penfold of slaughter, and for all their madness did but little.

Yet was the heart of the War-leader troubled; for he wotted that it might not last for ever, and there seemed no end to the throng of murder-carles; and the time would come when the arrowshot would be spent, and they must needs come to handy strokes, and that with so many.

Now a voice spake to him as he gazed with knitted brows and careful heart on that turmoil of battle:

'What now hast thou done with the Sun-beam, and where is her brother? Is the Chief of the Wolf skulking when our work is so heavy? And thou meseemeth art overlate on the field: the mowing of this meadow is no sluggard's work.'

He turned and beheld Bow-may, and gazed on her face for a moment, and saw her eyes how they glittered, and how the pommels of her cheeks were burning red and her lips dry and grey; but before he answered he looked all round about to see what was to note; and he touched Bow-may on the shoulder and pointed to down below where a man of the Felons had just come out of the court of one of the houses: a man taller than most, very gaily arrayed, with gilded scales all over him, so that, with his dark face and blue eyes, he looked like some strange dragon. Bow-may spake not, but stamped her foot with anger. Yet if her heart were hot, her hand was steady; for she notched a shaft, and just as the Dusky Chief raised his axe and brandished it aloft, she loosed, and the shaft flew and smote the felon in the armpit and the default of the armour, and he fell to earth. But even as she loosed, Face-of-god cried out in a loud voice:

'O lads of battle! shoot close and all together. Tarry not, tarry not! for we need a little time ere sword meets sword, and the others of the kindreds are at work!'

But Bow-may turned round to him and said: 'Wilt thou not answer me? Where is thy kindness gone?'

Even as she was speaking she had notched and loosed another shaft, speaking as folk do who turn from busy work at loom or bench.

Then said Face-of-god: 'Shoot on, sister Bow-may! The Sun-beam is gone with her brother, and he is with the Men of the Face.'

He broke off here, for a man fell beside him hurt in the neck, and Face-of-god took his bow from his hands and shot a shaft, while one of the women who had been hurt also tended the newly-wounded man. Then Face-of-god went on speaking:

'She was unwilling to go, but Folk-might and I constrained her; for we knew that this is the most perilous place of the battle—hah! see those three felons, Bow-may! they are aiming hither.'

And again he loosed and Bow-may also, but a shaft rattled on his helm withal and another smote a Woodlander beside him, and pierced through the calf of his leg, as he turned and stooped to take fresh arrows from a sheaf that lay there; but the carle took it by the notch

and the point, and brake it and drew it out, and then stood up and went on shooting. And Face-of-god spake again:

‘Folk-might skulketh not; nor the Men of the Vine, and the Sickle, and the Face, nor the Shepherd-Folk: soon shall they be making our work easy to us, if we can hold our own till then. They are on the other roads that lead into the square. Now suffer me, and shoot on!’

Therewith he looked round about him, and he saw on the left hand that all was quiet; and before him was the confused throng of the Dusky Men trampling their own dead and wounded, and not able as yet to cross that death-line of the arrow so near to them. But on his right hand he saw how they of the kindreds held them firm on the way. Then for a moment of time he considered and thought, till him-seemed he could see the whole battle yet to be foughten; and his face flushed, and he said sharply: ‘Bow-may, abide here and shoot, and show the others where to shoot, while the arrows hold out; but we will go further for a while, and ye shall follow when we have made the rent great enough.’

She turned to him and said: ‘Why art thou not more joyous? thou art like an host without music or banners.’

‘Nay,’ said he, ‘heed not me, but my bidding!’

She said hastily: ‘I think I shall die here; since for all we have shot we minish them no-wise. Now kiss me this once amidst the battle, and say farewell.’

He said: ‘Nay, nay; it shall not go thus. Abide a little while, and thou shalt see all this tangle open, as the sun cleaveth the clouds on the autumn morning. Yet lo thou! since thou wilt have it so.’

And he bent forward and kissed her face, and now the tears ran over it, and she said smiling somewhat: ‘Now is this more than I looked for, whatso may betide.’

But while she was yet speaking he cried in a great voice:

‘Ye who have spent your shot, or have nigh spent it, to axe and sword, and follow me to clear the ground ’twixt the bent and the halls. Let each help each, but throng not each other. Shoot wisely, ye bowmen, and keep our backs clear of the foe. On, on! for the Burg and the Face, for the Burg and the Face!’

Therewith he leapt down the steep of the hill, bounding like the hart, with Dale-warden naked in his hand; and they that followed were two score and ten; and the arrows of their bowmen rained over their heads on the Dusky Men, as they smote down the first of the foemen, and the others shrieked and shrank from them, or turned on them smiting wildly and desperately.

But Face-of-god swept round the great sword and plunged into that sea of turmoil and noise and evil sights and savours, and even therewith he heard clearly a voice that said: ‘Goldring, I am hurt; take my bow a while!’ and knew it for Bow-may’s; but it came to his ears like the song of a bird without meaning; for it was as if his life were changed at once; and in a minute or two he had cut thrice with the edge and thrust twice with the point, eager, but clear-eyed and deft; and he saw as in a picture the foe before him, and the grey roofs of Silver-stead, and through the gap in them the tops of the blue ridges far aloof. And now had three fallen before him, and they feared him, and turned on him, and smote so many together that their strokes crossed each other, and one warded him from the other; and he laughed aloud and shielded himself, and drave the point of Dale-warden amidst the tangle of weapons through the open mouth of a captain of the Felons, and slashed a cheek with a back-stroke, and swept round the edge to his right hand and smote off a blue-eyed snub-nosed head; and therewith a pole-axe smote him on the left side of his helm, so that he tottered; but he swung himself round, and stood stark and upright, and gave a short hack with the edge, keeping Dale-warden well in hand, and a gold-clad felon, a champion of them, and their tallest on the ground, fell aback, his throat gaping more than the mouth of him.

Then Face-of-god shouted and waved Dale-warden aloft to the Banner of the Wolf that floated behind and above him, and he cried out: ‘As I have promised so have I done!’ And he looked about, and beheld how valiantly his fellows had been doing; for before him now was a space of earth with no man standing on his feet thereon, like the swathe of the mowers of June; and beyond that was the crowd of the Dusky Men wavering like the tall grass abiding the scythe.

But a minute, and they fell to casting at Face-of-god and his fellows spears and knives and shields and whatsoever would fly; and a spear smote him on the breast, but entered not; and

a bossed shield fell over his face withal, and a plummet of sling-lead smote his helm, and he fell to earth; but leapt up again straightway, and heard as he arose a great shout close to him, and a shrill cry, and lo! at his left side Bow-may, her sword in her hand, and the hand red with blood from a shaft-graze on her wrist, and a white cloth stained with blood about her neck; and on his right side Wood-wise bearing the banner and crying the Wolf-whoop; for the whole company was come down from the slope and stood around him.

Then for a little while was there such a stilling of the tumult about him there, that he heard great and glad cries from the Road of the South of 'The Burg and the Steer! The Dale and the Bridge! The Dale and the Bull!' And thereafter a terrible great shrieking cry, and a huge voice that cried: 'Death, death, death to the Dusky Men!' And thereafter again fierce cries and great tumult of the battle.

Then Face-of-god shook Dale-warden in the air, and strode forward fiercely, but not speedily, and the whole company went foot for foot along with him; and as he went, would he or would he not, song came into his mouth, a song of the meadows of the Dale, even such as this:

The wheat is done blooming and rust's on the sickle,
 And green are the meadows grown after the scythe.
 Come, hands for the dance! For the toil hath been mickle,
 And 'twixt haysel and harvest 'tis time to be blithe.
 And what shall the tale be now dancing is over,
 And kind on the meadow sits maiden by man,
 And the old man bethinks him of days of the lover,
 And the warrior remembers the field that he wan?
 Shall we tell of the dear days wherein we are dwelling,
 The best days of our Mother, the cherishing Dale,
 When all round about us the summer is telling,
 To ears that may hearken, the heart of the tale?
 Shall we sing of these hands and these lips that caress us,
 And the limbs that sun-dappled lie light here beside,
 When still in the morning they rise but to bless us,
 And oft in the midnight our footsteps abide?
 O nay, but to tell of the fathers were better,
 And of how we were fashioned from out of the earth;
 Of how the once lowly spurned strong at the fetter;
 Of the days of the deeds and beginning of mirth.
 And then when the feast-tide is done in the morning,
 Shall we whet the grey sickle that bideth the wheat,
 Till wan grow the edges, and gleam forth a warning
 Of the field and the fallow where edges shall meet.
 And when cometh the harvest, and hook upon shoulder
 We enter the red wheat from out of the road,
 We shall sing, as we wend, of the bold and the bolder,
 And the Burg of their building, the beauteous abode.
 As smiteth the sickle amid the sun's burning
 We shall sing how the sun saw the token unfurled,
 When forth fared the Folk, with no thought of returning,
 In the days when the Banner went wide in the world.

Many saw that he was singing, but heard not the words of his mouth, for great was the noise and clamour. But he heard Bow-may, how she laughed by his side, and cried out:

'Gold-mane, dear-heart, now art thou merry indeed; and glad am I, though they told me that I am hurt.—Ah! now beware, beware!'

For indeed the Dusky Men, seeing the wall of steel rolling down on them, and cooped up by the houses, so that they scarce knew how to flee, turned in the face of death, the foremost of them, and rushed furiously on the array of the Woodlanders, and all those behind pressed on them like the big wave of the ebbing sea when the gust of the wind driveth it landward.

The Woodlanders met them, shouting out: 'The Greenwood and the Wolf, the Greenwood and the Wolf!' But not a few of them fell there, though they gave not back a foot; for so fierce now were the Dusky Men, that hewing and thrusting at them availed nought, unless they were slain outright or stunned; and even if they fell they rolled themselves up against their tall foe-men, heeding not death or wounds if they might but slay or wound. There then fell War-grove and ten others of the Woodlanders, and four men of the Wolf, but none before he had slain his foeman; and as each man fell or was hurt grievously, another took his place.

Now a felon leapt up and caught Gold-ring by the neck and drew him down, while another strove to smite his head off; but the stout carle drove a wood-knife into the side of the first felon, and drew it out speedily and smote the other, the smiter, in the face with the same knife, and therewith they all three rolled together on the earth amongst the feet of men. Even so

did another felon by Bow-may, and dragged her down to the ground, and smote her with a long knife as she tumbled down; and this was a feat of theirs, for they were long-armed like apes.

But as to this felon, Dale-warden's edge split his skull, and Face-of-god gathered his might together and bestrode Bow-may, till he had hewed a space round about him with great two-handed strokes; and yet the blade brake not. Then he caught up Bow-may from the earth, and the felon's knife had not pierced her hauberk, but she was astonished, and might not stand upon her feet; and Face-of-god turned aside a little with her, and half bore her, half thrust her through the throng to the rearward of his folk, and left her there with two carlines of the Wolf who followed the host for leechcraft's sake, and then turned back shouting: 'For the Face, for the Face!' and there followed him back to the battle, a band of those who were fresh as yet, and their blades unbloodied, the young men of the Woodlands.

The wearier fighters made way for them as they came on shouting, and Face-of-god was ahead of them all, and leapt at the foemen as a man unwearied and striking his first stroke, so wondrous hale he was; and they drave a wedge amidst of the Dusky Men, and then turned about and stood back to back hewing at all that drifted on them. But as Face-of-god cleared a space about him, lo! almost within reach of his sword-point up rose a grim shape from the earth, tall, grey-haired, and bloody-faced, who uttered the Wolf-whoop from amidst the terror of his visage, and turned and swung round his head an axe of the Dusky Men, and fell to smiting them with their own weapon. The Dusky Men shrieked in answer to his whoop, and all shrunk from him and Face-of-god; but a cry of joy went up from the kindred, for they knew Gold-ring, whom they deemed had been slain. So they all pressed on together, smiting down the foe before them, and the Dusky Men, some turned their backs and drave those behind them, till they too turned and were strained through the passages and courts of the houses, and some were overthrown and trodden down as they strove to hold face to the Woodlanders, and some were hewn down where they stood; but the whole throng of those that were on their feet drifted toward the Market-place, the Woodlanders following them ever with point and edge, till betwixt the bent and the houses no foeman stood up against them.

Then they stood together, and raised the whoop of victory, and blew their horns long and loud in token of their joy, and the Woodland men lifted up their voices and sang:

Now far, far aloof
Standeth lintel and roof,
The dwelling of days
Of the Woodland ways:
Now nought wendeth there
Save the wolf and the bear,
And the fox of the waste
Faring soft without haste.
No carle the axe whetteth on oak-laden hill;
No shaft the hart letteth to wend at his will;
None heedeth the thunder-clap over the glade,
And the wind-storm thereunder makes no man afraid.
Is it thus then that endeth man's days on Mid-earth,
For no man there wendeth in sorrow or mirth?
Nay, look down on the road
From the ancient abode!
Betwixt acre and field
Shineth helm, shineth shield.
And high over the heath
Fares the bane in his sheath;
For the wise men and bold
Go their ways o'er the wold.
Now the Warrior hath given them heart and fair day,
Unbidden, undriven, they fare to the fray.
By the rock and the river the banners they bear,
And their battle-staves quiver 'neath halbert and spear;
On the hill's brow they gather, and hang o'er the Dale
As the clouds of the Father hang, laden with bale.
Down shineth the sun
On the war-deed half done;
All the fore-doomed to die,
In the pale dust they lie.
There they leapt, there they fell,
And their tale shall we tell;
But we, e'en in the gate
Of the war-garth we wait,
Till the drift of war-weather shall whistle us on,
And we tread all together the way to be won,
To the dear land, the dwelling for whose sake we came

To do deeds for the telling of song-becrowned fame.
Settle helm on the head then! Heave sword for the Dale!
Nor be mocked of the dead men for deedless and pale.

CHAPTER XLVI. MEN MEET IN THE MARKET OF SILVER-STEAD.

So sang they; but Face-of-god went with Red-wolf, who was hurt sorely, but not deadly, and led him back toward the place just under the break of the bent; and there he found Bow-may in the hands of the women who were tending her hurts. She smiled on him from a pale face as he drew nigh, and he looked kindly at her, but he might not abide there, for haste was in his feet. He left Red-wolf to the tending of the women, and clomb the bent hastily, and when he deemed he was high enough, he looked about him; and somewhat more than half an hour had worn since Bow-may had sped the first shaft against the Dusky Men.

He looked down into the Market-stead, and deemed he could see that nigh the Mote-house the Dusky Men were gathering into some better order; but they were no longer drifting toward the southern bents, but were standing round about the altar as men abiding somewhat; and he deemed that they had gotten more bowshot than before, and that most of them bare bows. Though so many had been slain in the battles of the southern bents, yet was the Market-stead full of them, so to say, for others had come thereto in place of those that had fallen.

But now as he looked arose mighty clamour amongst them; and a little west of the Altar was a stir and a hurrying onward and around as in the eddies of a swift stream. Face-of-god wotted not what was betiding there, but he deemed that they were now ware of the onfall of Folk-might and Hall-face and the men of Burgdale, for their faces were all turned to where that was to be looked for.

So he turned and looked on the road to the east of him, where had been the battle of the Steer, but now it was all gone down toward the Market-place, and he could but hear the clamour of it; but nought he saw thereof, because of the houses that hid it.

Then he cast his eyes on the road that entered the Market-stead from the north, and he saw thereon many men gathered; and he wotted not what they were; for though there were weapons amongst them, yet were they not all weaponed, as far as he could see.

Now as he looked this way and that, and deemed that he must tarry no longer, but must enter into the courts of the houses before him and make his way into the Market-stead, lo! a change in the throng of Dusky Warriors nigh the Mote-house, and the ordered bands about the Altar fell to drifting toward the western way with one accord, with great noise and hurry and fierce cries of wrath. Then made Face-of-god no delay, but ran down the bent at once, and at the break of it came upon Bow-may standing upright and sword in hand; and as he passed, she joined herself to him, and said: 'What new tidings now, Gold-mane?'

'Tidings of battle!' he cried; 'tidings of victory! Folk-might hath fallen on, and the Dusky Men run hastily to meet him. Hark, hark!'

For as he spoke came a great noise of horns, and Bow-may said: 'What horn is that blowing?'

He stayed not, but shouted aloud: 'For the Face, for the Face! Now will we fall upon their backs!'

Therewith was he come to his company, and he cried out to them: 'Heard ye the horn, heard ye the horn? Now follow me into the Market-place; much is yet to do!'

Even therewith came the sound of other horns, and all men were silent a moment, and then shouted all together, for the Wood-landers knew it for the horn of the Shepherds coming on by the eastward way.

But Face-of-god waved his sword aloft and set on at once, and they followed and gat them through the courts of the houses and their passages into the Market-place. There they found more room than they looked to find; for the foemen had drawn away on the left hand toward the battle of Folk-might, and on the right hand toward the battle of the Steer; and great was the noise and cry that came thence.

Now stood Face-of-god under the two banners of the Wolf in the Market-place of Silver-stead, and scarce had he time to be high-hearted, for needs must he ponder in his mind what thing were best to do. For on the left hand he deemed the foe was the strongest and best ordered; but there also were the kindreds the doughtiest, and it was little like that the felons should overcome the spear-casters of the Face and the glaive-bearers of the Sickles, and the bowmen of the Vine: there also were the wisest leaders, as the stark elder Stone-face, and

the tall Hall-face, and his father of the unshaken heart, and above all Folk-might, fierce in his wrath, but his anger burning steady and clear, like the oaken butt on the hearth of the hall.

Then as his mind pictured him amongst the foe, it made therewith another picture of the slender warrior Sun-beam caught in the tangle of battle, and longing for him and calling for him amidst the hard hand-play. And thereat his face flushed, and all his body waxed hot, and he was on the very point of leading the onset against the foe on the left. But therewith he bethought him of the bold men of the Steer and the Bridge and the Bull weary with much fighting; and he remembered also that the Bride was amongst them and fighting, it might be, amidst the foremost, and if she were slain how should he ever hold up his head again. He bethought him also that the Shepherds, who had fallen on by the eastern road, valiant as they were, were scarce so well armed or so well led as the others. Therewithal he bethought him (and again it came like a picture into his mind) of falling on the foemen by whom the southern battle was beset, and then the twain of them meeting the Shepherds, and lastly, all those three companies joined together clearing the Market-place, and meeting the men under Folk-might in the midst thereof.

Therefore, scant had he been pondering these things in his mind for a minute ere he cried out: 'Blow up horns, blow up! forward banners, and follow me, O valiant men! to the helping of the Steer, the Bridge, and the Bull; deep have they thrust into the Dusky Throng, and belike are hard pressed. Hark how the clamour ariseth from their besetters! On now, on!'

Therewith hung a star of sunlight on his sword as he raised it aloft, and the Wolf-whoop rang out terribly in the Market-place, for now had the Woodlanders also learned it, and the hearts of the foemen sank as they heard the might and the mass thereof. Then the battle of the Woodlanders swept round and fell upon the flank of them who were besetting the kindreds, as an iron bar smiteth the soft fir-wood; and they of the kindreds heard their cry, but faintly and confusedly, so great was the turmoil of battle about them.

Now once more was Bow-may by the side of Face-of-god; and if she had not the might of the mightiest, yet had she the deftness of the deftest. And now was she calm and cool, shielding herself with a copper-bossed target, and driving home the point of her sharp sword; white was her face, and her eyes glittered amidst it, and she seemed to men like to those on whose heads the Warrior hath laid the Holy Bread.

As to Wood-wise, he had given the Banner of the red-jawed Wolf to Stone-wolf, a huge and dreadful warrior some forty winters old, who had fought in the Great Overthrow, and now hewed down the Dusky Men, wielding a heavy short-sword left-handed. But Wood-wise himself fought with a great sword, giving great strokes to the right hand and the left, and was no more hasty than is the hewer in the winter wood.

Face-of-god fought wisely and coldly now, and looked more to warding his friends than destroying his foes, and both to Bow-may and Wood-wise his sword was a shield; for oft he took the life from the edge of the upraised axe, and stayed the point of the foeman in mid-air.

Even so wisely fought the whole band of the Woodlanders and the Wolves, who got within smiting space of the foe; for they had no will to cast away their lives when assured victory was so nigh to them. Sooth to say, the hand-play was not so hard to them as it had been betwixt the bent and the houses; for the Dusky Men were intent on dealing with the men of the kindreds from the southern road, who stood war-wearied before them; and they were hewing and casting at them, and baying and yelling like dogs; and though they turned about to meet the storm of the Woodlanders, yet their hearts failed them withal, and they strove to edge away from betwixt those two fearful scythes of war, fighting as men fleeing, not as men in onset. But still the Woodlanders and the Wolves came on, hewing and thrusting, smiting down the foemen in heaps, till the Dusky Throng grew thin, and the staves of the Dalesmen and their bright banners in the morning sun were clear to see, and at last their very faces, kindly and familiar, worn and strained with the stress of battle, or laughing wildly, or pale with the fury of the fight. Then rose up to the heavens the blended shout of the Woodlanders and the Dalesmen, and now there was nought of foemen betwixt them save the dead and the wounded.

Then Face-of-god thrust his sword into its sheath all bloody as it was, and strode over the dead men to where Hall-ward stood under the banner of the Steer, and cast his arms about the old carle, and kissed him for joy of the victory. But Hall-ward thrust him aback and looked him in the face, and his cheeks were pale and his lips clenched, and his eyes haggard and staring, and he said in a harsh voice:

'O young man, she is dead! I saw her fall. The Bride is dead, and thou hast lost thy troth-plight maiden. O death, death to the Dusky Men!'

Then grew Face-of-god as pale as a linen sleeve, and all the new-comers groaned and cried out. But a bystander said: 'Nay, nay, it is nought so bad as that; she is hurt, and sorely; but she liveth yet.'

Face-of-god heard him not. He forgot Dale-warden lying in his sheath, and he saw that the last speaker had a great wood-axe broad and heavy in his hand, so he cried: 'Man, man, thine axe!' and snatched it from him, and turned about to the foe again, and thrust through the ranks, suffering none to stay him till all his friends were behind and all his foes before him. And as he burst forth from the ranks waving his axe aloft, bare-headed now, his yellow hair flying abroad, his mouth crying out, 'Death, death, death to the Dusky Men!' fear of him smote their hearts, and they howled and fled before him as they might; for they said that the Dalesmen had prayed their Gods into the battle. But not so fast could they flee but he was presently amidst them, smiting down all about him, and they so terror-stricken that scarce might they raise a hand against him. All that blended host followed him mad with wrath and victory, and as they pressed on, they heard behind them the horns and war-cries of the Shepherds falling on from the east. Nought they heeded that now, but drave on a fearful storm of war, and terrible was the slaughter of the Felons.

It was but a few minutes ere they had driven them up against that great stack of faggots that had been dight for the burnt-offering of men, and many of the felons had mounted up on to it, and now in their anguish of fear were shooting arrows and casting spears on all about them, heeding little if they were friend or foe. Now were the men of the kindreds at point to climb this twiggen burg; but by this time the fury of Face-of-god had run clear, and he knew where he was and what he was doing; so he stayed his folk, and cried out to them: 'Forbear, climb not! let the torch help the sword!' And therewith he looked about and saw the fire-pot which had been set down there for the kindling of the bale-fire, and the coals were yet red in it; so he snatched up a dry brand and lighted it thereat, and so did divers others, and they thrust them among the faggots, and the fire caught at once, and the tongues of flame began to leap from faggot to faggot till all was in a light low; for the wood had been laid for that very end, and smeared with grease and oil so that the burning to the god might be speedy.

But the fierceness of the kindreds heeded not the fire, nor overmuch the men who leapt down from the stack before it, but they left all behind them, faring straight toward the western outgate from the Market-stead; and Face-of-god still led them on; though by now he was wholly come to his right mind again, albeit the burden of sorrow yet lay heavy on his heart. He had broken his axe, and had once more drawn Dale-warden from his sheath, and many felt his point and edge.

But now, as they chased, came a rush of men upon them again, as though a new onset were at hand. That saw Face-of-god and Hall-ward and War-well, and other wise leaders of men, and they bade their folk forbear the chase, and lock their ranks to meet the onfall of this new wave of foemen. And they did so, and stood fast as a wall; but lo! the onrush that drave up against them was but a fleeing shrieking throng, and no longer an array of warriors, for many had cast away their weapons, and were rushing they knew not whither; for they were being thrust on the bitter edges of Face-of-god's companies by the terror of the fleers from the onset of the men of the Face, the Sickle, and the Vine, whom Hall-face and Stone-face were leading, along with Folk-might. Then once again the men of Face-of-god gave forth the whoop of victory, and pressed forward again, hewing their way through the throng of fleers, but turning not to chase to the right or the left; while at their backs came on the Shepherd-folk, who had swept down all that withstood them; for now indeed was the Market-stead getting thinner of living men.

So led the War-leader his ordered ranks, till at last over the tangled crowd of runaways he saw the banners of the Burg and the Face flashing against the sun, and heard the roar of the kindreds as they drave the chase towards them. Then he lifted up his sword, and stood still, and all the host behind him stayed and cast a huge shout up to the heavens, and there they abode the coming of the other Dalesmen.

But the War-leader sent a message to Hound-under-Greenbury, bidding him lead the Shepherds to the chase of the Dusky Men, who were now all fleeing toward the northern outgate of the Market. Howbeit he called to mind the throng he had seen on the northern road before they were come into the Market-stead, and deemed that way also death awaited the foemen,

even if the men of the kindreds forbore them.

But presently the space betwixt the Woodlanders and the men of the Face was clear of all but the dead, so that friend saw the face of friend; and it could be seen that the warriors of the Face were ruddy and smiling for joy, because the battle had been easy to them, and but few of them had fallen; for the Dusky Men who had left the Market-stead to fall on them, had had room for fleeing behind them, and had speedily turned their backs before the spear-casting of the men of the Face and the onrush of the swordsmen.

There then stood these victorious men facing one another, and the banner-bearers on either side came through the throng, and brought the banners together between the two hosts; and the Wolf kissed the Face, and the Sickle and the Vine met the Steer and the Bridge and the Bull: but the Shepherds were yet chasing the fleers.

There in the forefront stood Hall-face the tall, with the joy of battle in his eyes. And Stone-face, the wise carle in war, stood solemn and stark beside him; and there was the goodly body and the fair and kindly visage of the Alderman smiling on the faces of his friends. But as for Folk-might, his face was yet white and awful with anger, and he looked restlessly up and down the front of the kindreds, though he spake no word.

Then Face-of-god could no longer forbear, but he thrust Dale-warden into his sheath, and ran forward and cast his arms about his father's neck and kissed him; and the blood of himself and of the foemen was on him, for he had been hurt in divers places, but not sorely, because of the good hammer-work of the Alderman.

Then he kissed his brother and Stone-face, and he took Folk-might by the hand, and was on the point of speaking some word to him, when the ranks of the Face opened, and lo! the Sun-beam in her bright war-gear, and the sword girt to her side, and she unhurt and unsullied.

Then was it to him as when he met her first in Shadowy Vale, and he thought of little else than her; but she stepped lightly up to him, and unashamed before the whole host she kissed him on the mouth, and he cast his mailed arms about her, and joy made him forget many things and what was next to do, though even at that moment came afresh a great clamour of shrieks and cries from the northern outgate of the Market-stead: and the burning pile behind them cast a great wavering flame into the air, contending with the bright sun of that fair day, now come hard on noontide. But ere he drew away his face from the Sun-beam's, came memory to him, and a sharp pang shot through his heart, as he heard Folk-might say: 'Where then is the Shield-may of Burgstead? where is the Bride?'

And Face-of-god said under his breath: 'She is dead, she is dead!' And then he stared out straight before him and waited till someone else should say it aloud. But Bow-may stepped forward and said: 'Chief of the Wolf, be of good cheer; our kinswoman is hurt, but not deadly.'

The Alderman's face changed, and he said: 'Hast thou seen her, Bow-may?'

'Nay,' she said. 'How should I leave the battle? but others have told me who have seen her.'

Folk-might stared into the ranks of men before him, but said nothing. Said the Alderman: 'Is she well tended?'

'Yea, surely,' said Bow-may, 'since she is amongst friends, and there are no foemen behind us.'

Then came a voice from Folk-might which said: 'Now were it best to send good men and deft in arms, and who know Silver-dale, from house to house, to search for foemen who may be lurking there.'

The Alderman looked kindly and sadly on him and said:

'Kinsman Stone-face, and Hall-face my son, the brunt of the battle is now over, and I am but a simple man amongst you; therefore, if ye will give me leave, I will go see this poor kinswoman of ours, and comfort her.'

They bade him go: so he sheathed his sword, and went through the press with two men of the Steer toward the southern road; for the Bride had been brought into a house nigh the corner of the Market-place.

But Face-of-god looked after his father as he went, and remembrance of past days came upon him, and such a storm of grief swept over him, as he thought of the Bride lying pale and bleeding and brought anigh to her death, that he put his hands to his face and wept as a child that will not be comforted; nor had he any shame of all those bystanders, who in sooth were men good and kindly, and had no shame of his grief or marvelled at it, for indeed their own hearts were sore for their lovely kinswoman, and many of them also wept with Face-of-

god. But the Sun-beam stood by and looked on her betrothed, and she thought many things of the Bride, and was sorry, albeit no tears came into her eyes; then she looked askance at Folk-might and trembled; but he said coldly, and in a loud voice:

‘Needs must we search the houses for the lurking felons, or many a man will yet be murdered. Let Wood-wicked lead a band of men at once from house to house.’

Then said a man of the Wolf high Hardgrip: ‘Wood-wicked was slain betwixt the bent and the houses.’

Said Folk-might: ‘Let it be Wood-wise then.’

But Bow-may said: ‘Wood-wise is even now hurt in the leg by a wounded felon, and may not go afoot.’

Then said Folk-might: ‘Is Crow the Shaft-speeder anigh?’

‘Yea, here am I,’ quoth a tall man of fifty winters, coming from out the ranks where stood the Wolves.

Said Folk-might: ‘Kinsman Crow, do thou take two score and ten of doughty men who are not too hot-headed, and search every house about the Market-place; but if ye come on any house that makes a stout defence, send ye word thereof to the Mote-house, where we will presently be, and we shall send you help. Slay every felon that ye fall in with; but if ye find in the houses any of the poor folk crouching and afraid, comfort their hearts all ye may, and tell them that now is life come to them.’

So Crow fell to getting his band together, and presently departed with them on his errand.

CHAPTER XLVII. THE KINDREDS WIN THE MOTE-HOUSE.

The din and tumult still came from the north side of the Market-place, so that all the air was full of noise; and Face-of-god deemed that the thralls had gotten weapons into their hands and were slaying their masters.

Now he lifted up his face, and put his hand on Folk-might’s shoulder, and said in a loud voice:

‘Kinsmen, it were well if our brother were to bid the banners into the Mote-house of the Wolf, and let all the Host set itself in array before the said house, and abide till the chasers of the foe come to us thither; for I perceive that they are now become many, and are more than those of our kindred.’

Then Folk-might looked at him with kind eyes, and said:

‘Thou sayest well, brother; even so let it be!’

And he lifted up his sword, and Face-of-god cried out in a loud voice: ‘Forward, banners! blow up horns! fare we forth with victory!’

So the Host drew its ranks together in good order, and they all set forward, and old Stone-face took the Sun-beam by the hand and led on behind Folk-might and the War-leader. But when they came to the Hall, then saw they how the steps that led up to the door were high and double, going up from each side without any railing or fool-guard; and crowding the stairs and the platform thereof was a band of the Dusky Men, as many as could stand thereon, who shot arrows at the host of the kindreds, howling like dogs, and chattering like apes; and arrows and spears came from the windows of the Hall; yea, and on the very roof a score of these felons were riding the ridge and mocking like the trolls of old days.

Now when they saw this they stayed a while, and men shielded them against the shafts; but the leaders drew together in front of the Host, and Folk-might fell to speech; and his face was very pale and stern; for now he had had time to think of the case of the Bride, and fierce wrath, and grief unholpen filled his soul. So he said:

‘Brothers, this is my business to deal with; for I see before me the stair that leadeth to the Mote-house of my people, and now would I sit there whereas my fathers sat, when peace was on the Dale, as once more it shall be to-morrow. Therefore up this stair will I go, and none shall hinder me; and let no man of the host follow me till I have entered into the Hall, unless perchance I fall dead by the way; but stand ye still and look on.’

‘Nay,’ said Face-of-god, ‘this is partly the business of the War-leader. There are two stairs. Be content to take the southern one, and I will take the northern. We shall meet on the plain stone at the top.’

But Hall-face said: ‘War-leader, may I speak?’

‘Speak, brother,’ said Face-of-god.

Said Hall-face: ‘I have done but little to-day, War-leader. I would stand by thee on the northern stair; so shall Folk-might be content, if he doeth two men’s work who are not little-hearted.’

Said Face-of-god: ‘The doom of the War-leader is that Folk-might shall fall on by the southern stair to slake his grief and increase his glory, and Face-of-god and Hall-face by the northern. Haste to the work, O brothers!’

And he and Hall-face went to their places, while all looked on. But the Sun-beam, with her hand still in Stone-face’s, she turned white to the lips, and stared with wild eyes before her, not knowing where she was; for she had deemed that the battle was over, and Face-of-god saved from it.

But Folk-might tossed up his head and laughed, and cried out, ‘At last, at last!’ And his sword was in his hand, the Sleep-thorn to wit, a blade of ancient fame; so now he let it fall and hang to his wrist by the leash, while he clapped his hands together and uttered the Wolf-whoop mightily, and all the men of the Wolf that were in the host, and the Woodlanders withal, uttered it with him. Then he put his shield over his head and stood before the first of the steps, and the Dusky Men laughed to see one man come against them, though there was death in their hearts. But he laughed back at them in triumph, and set his foot on the step, and let Sleep-thorn’s point go into the throat of a Dusky lord, and thrust amongst them, hewing right and left, and tumbling men over the edge of the stair, which was to them as the narrow path along the cliff-side that hangeth over the unfathomed sea. They hewed and thrust at him in turn; but so close were they packed that their weapons crossed about him, and one shielded him from the other, and they swayed staggering on that fearful verge, while the Sleep-thorn crept here and there amongst them, lulling their hot fury. For, as desperate as they were, and fighting for death and not for life, they had a horror of him and of the sea of hatred below them, and feared where to set their feet, and he feared nought at all, but from feet to sword-point was but an engine of slaughter, while the heart within him throbbed with fury long held back as he thought upon the Bride and her wounding, and all the wrongs of his people since their Great Undoing.

So he smote and thrust, till him-seemed the throng of foes thinned before him: with his sword-pommel he smote a lord of the Dusky Ones in the face, so that he fell over the edge amongst the spears of the kindred; then he thrust the point of Sleep-thorn towards the Hall-door through the breast of another, and then it seemed to him that he had but one before him; so he hove up the edges to cleave him down, but ere the stroke fell, close to his ears exceeding loud rang out the cry, ‘For the Burg and the Face! for the Face, for the Face!’ and he drew aback a little, and his eyes cleared, and lo! it was Hall-face the tall, his long sword all reddened with battle; and beside him stood Face-of-god, silent and panting, his face pale with the fierce anger of the fight, and the weariness which was now at last gaining upon him. There stood those three with no other living man upon the plain of the stairs.

Then Face-of-god turned shouting to the Folk, and cried:

‘Forth now with the banners! For now is the Wolf come home. On into the Hall, O Kindred of the Gods!’

Then poured the Folk up over the stairs and into the Hall of the Wolf, the banners flapping over their heads; and first went the War-leader and Folk-might and Hall-face, and then the three delivered thralls, Wolf-stone, God-swain, and Spear-fist, and Dallach with them, though both he and Wolf-stone had been hurt in the battle; and then came blended together the Men of the Face along with them of the Wolf who had entered the Market-stead with them, and with these were Stone-face and Wood-wont and Bow-may, leading the Sun-beam betwixt them; and now was she come to herself again, though her face was yet pale, and her eyes gleamed as she stepped across the threshold of the Hall.

But when a many were gotten in, and the first-comers had had time to handle their weapons and look about them, a cry of the utmost wrath broke from Folk-might and those others who remembered the Hall from of old. For wretched and befouled was that well-built house: the hangings rent away; the goodly painted walls daubed and smeared with wicked tokens of the Alien murderers: the floor, once bright with polished stones of the mountain, and strewn with sweet-smelling flowers, was now as foul as the den of the man-devouring troll of the heaths. From the fair-carven roof of oak and chestnut-beams hung ugly knots of rags and shapeless images of the sorcery of the Dusky Men. And furthermore, and above all, from the

last tie-beam of the roof over the daïs dangled four shapes of men-at-arms, whom the older men of the Wolf knew at once for the embalmed bodies of their four great chieftains, who had been slain on the day of the Great Undoing; and they cried out with horror and rage as they saw them hanging there in their weapons as they had lived.

There was the Hostage of the Earth, his shield painted with the green world circled with the worm of the sea. There was the older Folk-might, the uncle of the living man, bearing a shield with an oak and a lion done thereon. There was Wealth-eker, on whose shield was done a golden sheaf of wheat. There was he who bore a name great from of old, Folk-wolf to wit, bearing on his shield the axe of the hewer. There they hung, dusty, befouled, with sightless eyes and grinning mouths, in the dimmed sunlight of the Hall, before the eyes of that victorious Host, stricken silent at the sight of them.

Underneath them on the daïs stood the last remnant of the battle of the Dusky Men; and they, as men mad with coming death, shook their weapons, and with shrieking laughter mocked at the overcomers, and pointed to the long-dead chiefs, and called on them in the tongue of the kindreds to come down and lead their dear kinsmen to the high-seat; and then they cried out to the living warriors of the Wolf, and bade them better their deed of slaying, and set to work to make alive again, and cause their kinsmen to live merry on the earth.

With that last mock they handled their weapons and rushed howling on the warriors to meet their death; nor was it long denied them; for the sword of the Wolf, the axe of the Woodland, and the spear of the Dale soon made an end of the dreadful lives of these destroyers of the Folks.

CHAPTER XLVIII. MEN SING IN THE MOTE-HOUSE.

Then strode the Warriors of the Wolf over the bodies of the slain on to the daïs of their own Hall; and Folk-might led the Sun-beam by the hand, and now was his sword in its sheath, and his face was grown calm, though it was stern and sad. But even as he trod the daïs comes a slim swain of the Wolves twisting himself through the throng, and so maketh way to Folk-might, and saith to him:

‘Chieftain, the Alderman of Burgdale sendeth me hither to say a word to thee; even this, which I am to tell to thee and the War-leader both: It is most true that our kinswoman the Bride will not die, but live. So help me, the Warrior and the Face! This is the word of the Alderman.’

When Folk-might heard this, his face changed and he hung his head; and Face-of-god, who was standing close by, beheld him and deemed that tears were falling from his eyes on to the hall-floor. As for him, he grew exceeding glad, and he turned to the Sun-beam and met her eyes, and saw that she could scarce refrain her longing for him; and he was abashed for the sweetness of his love. But she drew close up to him, and spake to him softly and said:

‘This is the day that maketh amends; and yet I long for another day. When I saw thee coming to me that first day in Shadowy Vale, I thought thee so goodly a warrior that my heart was in my mouth. But now how goodly thou art! For the battle is over, and we shall live.’

‘Yea,’ said Face-of-god, ‘and none shall begrudge us our love. Behold thy brother, the hard-heart, the warrior; he weepeth because he hath heard that the Bride shall live. Be sure then that she shall not gainsay him. O fair shall the world be to-morrow!’

But she said: ‘O Gold-mane, I have no words. Is there no minstrelsy amongst us?’

Now by this time were many of the men of the Wolf and the Woodlanders gathered on the daïs of the Hall; and the Dalesmen noting this, and wotting that these men were now in their own Mote-house, withdrew them as they might for the press toward the nether end thereof. That the Sun-beam noted, and that all those about her save the War-leader were of the kindreds of the Wolf and the Woodland, and, still speaking softly, she said to Face-of-god:

‘Gold-mane, meseemeth I am now in my wrong place; for now the Wolf raiseth up his head, but I am departing from him. Surely I should now be standing amongst my people of the Face, whereto I am going ere long.’

He said: ‘Beloved, I am now become thy kindred and thine home, and it is meet for thee to stand beside me.’

She cast her eyes adown and answered not; and she fell a-pondering of how sorely she had desired that fair dale, and now she would leave it, and be content and more than content.

But now the kindreds had sundered, they upon the daïs ranked themselves together there in

the House which their fathers had builded; and when they saw themselves so meetly ordered, their hearts being full with the sweetness of hope accomplished and the joy of deliverance from death, song arose amongst them, and they fell to singing together; and this is somewhat of their singing:

Now raise we the lay
Of the long-coming day!
Bright, white was the sun
When we saw it begun:
O'er its noon now we live;
It hath ceased not to give;
It shall give, and give more
From the wealth of its store.
O fair was the yesterday! Kindly and good
Was the wasteland our guster, and kind was the wood;
Though below us for reaping lay under our hand
The harvest of weeping, the grief of the land;
Dumb cowered the sorrow, nought daring to cry
On the help of to-morrow, the deed drawing nigh.
All increase throve
In the Dale of our love;
There the ox and the steed
Fed down the mead;
The grapes hung high
'Twixt earth and sky,
And the apples fell
Round the orchard well.
Yet drear was the land there, and all was for nought;
None put forth a hand there for what the year wrought,
And raised it o'erflowing with gifts of the earth.
For man's grief was growing beside of the mirth
Of the springs and the summers that wasted their wealth;
And the birds, the new-comers, made merry by stealth.
Yet here of old
Abode the bold;
Nor had they wailed
Though the wheat had failed,
And the vine no more
Gave forth her store.
Yea, they found the waste good
For the fearless of mood.
Then to these, that were dwelling aloof from the Dale,
Fared the wild-wind a-telling the worst of the tale;
As men bathed in the morning they saw in the pool
The image of scorning, the throne of the fool.
The picture was gleaming in helm and in sword,
And shone forth its seeming from cups of the board.
Forth then they came
With the battle-flame;
From the Wood and the Waste
And the Dale did they haste:
They saw the storm rise,
And with untroubled eyes
The war-storm they met;
And the rain ruddy-wet.
O'er the Dale then was litten the Candle of Day,
Night-sorrow was smitten, and gloom fled away.
How the grief-shackles sunder! How many to morn
Shall awaken and wonder how gladness was born!
O went unto sorrow, how sweet unto you
Shall be pondering to-morrow what deed is to do!
Fell many a man
'Neath the edges wan,
In the heat of the play
That fashioned the day.
Praise all ye then
The death of men,
And the gift of the aid
Of the unafraid!
O strong are the living men mighty to save,
And good is their giving, and gifts that we have!
But the dead, they that gave us once, never again;
Long and long shall they save us sore trouble and pain.
O Banner above us, O God of the strong,
Love them as ye love us that bore down our wrong!

So they sang in the Hall; and there was many a man wept, as the song ended, for those that should never see the good days of the Dale, and all the joy that was to be; and men swore, by all that they loved, that they would never forget those that had fallen in the Winning of

Silver-dale; and that when each year the Cups of Memory went round, they should be no mere names to them, but the very men whom they had known and loved.

CHAPTER XLIX. DALLACH FARETH TO ROSE-DALE: CROW TELLETH OF HIS ERRAND: THE KINDREDS EAT THEIR MEAT IN SILVER-DALE.

Now Dallach, who had gone away for a while, came back again into the Hall; and at his back were a half score of men who bore ladders with them: they were stout men, clad in scanty and ragged raiment, but girt with swords and bearing axes, those of them who were not handling the ladders. Men looked on them curiously, because they saw them to be of the roughest of the thralls. They were sullen and fierce-eyed to behold, and their hands and bare arms were flecked with blood; and it was easy to see that they had been chasing the fleers, and making them pay for their many torments of past days.

But when Face-of-god beheld this he cried out: 'Ho, Dallach! is it so that thou hast bethought thee to bring in hither men to fall to the cleansing of the Hall, and to do away the defiling of the Dusky Men?'

'Even so, War-leader,' said Dallach; 'also ye shall know that all battle is over in Silver-stead; for the thralls fell in numbers not to be endured on the Dusky Men who had turned their backs to us, and hindered them from fleeing north. But though they have slain many, they have not slain all, and the remnant have fled by divers ways westaway, that they may gain the wood and the ways to Rose-dale; and the stoutest of the thralls are at their heels, and ever as they go fresh men from the fields join in the chase with great joy. I have gathered together of the best of them two hundreds and a half well-armed; and if thou wilt give me leave, I will get to me yet more, and follow hard on the fleers, and so get me home to Rose-dale; for thither will these runaways to meet whatso of their kind may be left there. Also I would fain be there to set some order amongst the poor folk of mine own people, whom this day's work hath delivered from torment. And if thou wilt suffer a few men of the Dalesmen to come along with me, then shall all things be better done there.'

'Luck go with thine hands!' said Face-of-god. 'Take whomso thou wilt of the Burgdalers that have a mind to fare with thee to the number of five score; and send word of thy thriving to Folk-might, the chieftain of the Dale; as for us, meseemeth that we shall abide here no long while. How sayest thou, Folk-might, shall Dallach go?'

Then Folk-might, who stood close beside him, looked up and reddened somewhat, as a man caught heedless when he should be heedful; but he looked kindly on Face-of-god, and said:

'War-leader, so long as thou art in the Dale which ye kindreds have won back for us, thou art the chieftain, and no other, and I bid thee do as thou wilt in this matter, and in all things; and I hereby give command to all my kindred to do according to thy will everywhere and always, as they love me; and indeed I deem that thy will shall be theirs; since it is only fools who know not their well-wishers. How say ye, kinsmen?'

Then those about cried out: 'Hail to Face-of-god! Hail to the Dalesmen! Hail to our friends!'

But Folk-might went up to Face-of-god, and threw his arms about him and kissed him, and he said therewithal, so that most men heard him:

'Herewith I kiss not only thee, thou goodly and glorious warrior! but this kiss and embrace is for all the men of the kindreds of the Dale and the Shepherds; since I deem that never have men more valiant dwelt upon the earth.'

Therewith all men shouted for joy of him, and were exceeding glad; but Folk-might spake apart to Face-of-god and said:

'Brother, I suppose that thou wilt deem it good to abide in this Hall or anigh it; for hereabouts now is the heart of the Host. But as for me, I would have leave to depart for a little; since I have an errand, whereof thou mayest wot.'

Then Face-of-god smiled on him, and said: 'Go, and all good go with thee; and tell my father that I would have tidings, since I may not be there.' So he spake; yet in his heart was he glad that he might not go to behold the Bride lying sick and sorry. But Folk-might departed without more words; and in the door of the Hall he met Crow the Shaft-speeder, who would have spoken to him, and given him the tidings; but Folk-might said to him: 'Do thine errand to the War-leader, who is within the Hall.' And so went on his way.

Then came Crow up the Hall, and stood before Face-of-god and said: 'War-leader, we have done that which was to be done, and have cleared all the houses about the Market-stead. Moreover, by the rede of Dallach we have set certain men of the poor folk of the Dale, who are well looked to by the others, to the burying of the slain felons; and they be digging trenches in the fields on the north side of the Market-stead, and carry the carcasses thither as they may. But the slain whom they find of the kindreds do they array out yonder before this Hall. In all wise are these men tame and biddable, save that they rage against the Dusky Men, though they fear them yet. As for us, they deem us Gods come down from heaven to help them. So much for what is good: now have I an ill word to say; to wit, that in the houses whereas we have found many thralls alive, yet also have we found many dead; for amongst these murder-carles were some of an evil sort, who, when they saw that the battle would go against them, rushed into the houses hewing down all before them—man, woman, and child; so that many of the halls and chambers we saw running blood like to shambles. To be short: of them whom they were going to hew to the Gods, we have found thirteen living and three dead, of which latter is one woman; and of the living, seven women; and all these, living and dead, with the leaden shackles yet on them wherein they should be burned. To all these and others whom we have found, we have done what of service we could in the way of victual and clothes, so that they scarce believe that they are on this lower earth. Moreover, I have with me two score of them, who are men of some wits, and who know of the stores of victual and other wares which the felons had, and these will fetch and carry for you as much as ye will. Is all done rightly, War-leader?'

'Right well,' said Face-of-god, 'and we give thee our thanks therefor. And now it were well if these thy folk were to dight our dinner for us in some green field the nighest that may be, and thither shall all the Host be bidden by sound of horn. Meantime, let us void this Hall till it be cleansed of the filth of the Dusky Ones; but hereafter shall we come again to it, and light a fire on the Holy Hearth, and bid the Gods and the Fathers come back and behold their children sitting glad in the ancient Hall.'

Then men shouted and were exceeding joyous; but Face-of-god said once more: 'Bear ye a bench out into the Market-place over against the door of this Hall: thereon will I sit with other chieftains of the kindreds, that whoso will may have recourse to us.'

So therewith all the men of the kindreds made their ways out of the Hall and into the Market-stead, which was by this time much cleared of the slaughtered felons; and the bale for the burnt-offering was now but smouldering, and a thin column of blue smoke was going up wavering amidst the light airs of the afternoon. Men were somewhat silent now; for they were stiff and weary with the morning's battle; and a many had been hurt withal; and on many there yet rested the after-grief of battle, and sorrow for the loss of friends and well-wishers.

For in the battle had fallen one long hundred and two of the men of the Host; and of these were two score and five of the kindreds of the Steer, the Bull, and the Bridge, who had made such valiant onslaught by the southern road. Of the Shepherds died one score save three; for though they scattered the foe at once, yet they fell on with such headlong valour, rather than wisely, that many were trapped in the throng of the Dusky Men. Of the Woodlanders were slain one score and nine; for hard had been the fight about them, and no man of them spared himself one whit. Of the men of the Wolf, who were but a few, fell sixteen men, and all save two of these in Face-of-god's battle. Of the Burgdale men whom Folk-might led, to wit, them of the Face, the Vine, and the Sickles, were but seven men slain outright. In this tale are told all those who died of their hurts after the day of battle. Therewithal many others were sorely hurt who mended, and went about afterwards hale and hearty.

So as the folk abode in the Market-place, somewhat faint and weary, they heard horns blow up merrily, and Crow the Shaft-speeder came forth and stood on the mound of the altar, and bade men fare to dinner, and therewith he led the way, bearing in his hand the banner of the Golden Bushel, of which House he was; and they followed him into a fair and great mead on the southwest of Silver-stead, besprinkled about with ancient trees of sweet chestnut. There they found the boards spread for them with the best of victual which the poor down-trodden folk knew how to dight for them; and especially was there great plenty of good wine of the sun-smitten bents.

So they fell to their meat, and the poor folk, both men and women, served them gladly, though they were somewhat afeard of these fierce sword-wielders, the Gods who had delivered them. The said thralls were mostly not of those who had fallen so bitterly on their fleeing masters, but were men and women of the households, not so roughly treated as the others,

that is to say, those who had been wont to toil under the lash in the fields and the silver-mines, and were as wild as they durst be.

As for these waiting-thralls, the men of the kindreds were gentle and blithe with them, and often as they served them would they stay their hands (and especially if they were women), and would draw down their heads to put a morsel in their mouths, or set the wine-cup to their lips; and they would stroke them and caress them, and treat them in all wise as their dear friends. Moreover, when any man was full, he would arise and take hold of one of the thralls, and set him in his place, and serve him with meat and drink, and talk with him kindly, so that the poor folk were much bewildered with joy. And the first that arose from table were the Sun-beam and Bow-may and Hall-face, with many of the swains and the women of the Woodlanders; and they went from table to table serving the others.

The Sun-beam had done off her armour, and went about exceeding fair and lovely in her kirtle; but Bow-may yet bore her hauberk, for she loved it, and indeed it was so fine and well-wrought that it was no great burden. Albeit she had gone down with the Sun-beam and other women to a fair stream thereby, and there had they bathed and washed themselves; and Bow-may's hurts, which were not great, had been looked to and bound up afresh, and she had come to table unhelmed, with a wreath of wind-flowers round her head.

There then they feasted; and their hearts were strengthened by the meat and drink; and if sorrow were blended with their joy, yet were they high-hearted through both joy and sorrow, looking forward to the good days to be in the Dales at the Roots of the Mountains, and the love and fellowship of Folks and of Houses.

But as for Face-of-god, he went not to the meadow, but abode sitting on the bench in the Market-place, where were none else now of the kindreds save the appointed warders. They had brought him a morsel and a cup of wine, and he had eaten and drunk; and now he sat there with Dale-warden lying sheathed across his knees, and seeming to gaze on the thralls of Silver-dale busied in carrying away the bodies of the slain felons, after they had stripped them of their raiment and weapons. Yet indeed all this was before his eyes as a picture which he noted not. Rather he sat pondering many things; wondering at his being there in Silver-dale in the hour of victory; longing for the peace of Burgdale and the bride-chamber of the Sun-beam. Then went his thought out toward his old playmate lying hurt in Silver-dale; and his heart was grieved because of her, yet not for long, though his thought still dwelt on her; since he deemed that she would live and presently be happy—and happy thenceforward for many years. So pondered Face-of-god in the Market-place of Silver-dale.

CHAPTER L. FOLK-MIGHT SEETH THE BRIDE AND SPEAKETH WITH HER.

Now tells the tale of Folk-might, that he went his ways from the Hall to the house where the Bride lay; and the swain who had brought the message went along with him, and he was proud of walking beside so mighty a warrior, and he talked to Folk-might as they went; and the sound of his voice was irksome to the chieftain, but he made as though he hearkened. Yet when they came to the door of the house, which was just out of the Place on the Southern road (for thereby had the Bride fallen to earth), he could withhold his grief no longer, but turned on the threshold and laid his head on the door-jamb, and sobbed and wept till the tears fell down like rain. And the boy stood by wondering, and wishing that Folk-might would forbear weeping, but durst not speak to him.

In a while Folk-might left weeping and went in, and found a fair hall sore befouled by the felons, and in the corner on a bed covered with furs the wounded woman; and at first sight he deemed her not so pale as he looked to see her, as she lay with her long dark-red hair strewn over the pillow, her head moving about wearily. A linen cloth was thrown over her body, but her arms lay out of it before her. Beside her sat the Alderman, his face sober enough, but not as one in heavy sorrow; and anigh him was another chair as if someone had but just got up from it. There was no one else in the hall save two women of the Woodlanders, one of whom was cooking some potion on the hearth, and another was sweeping the floor anigh of bran or some such stuff, which had been thrown down to sop up the blood.

So Folk-might went up to the Bride, sorely dreading the image of death which she had grown to be, and sorely loving the woman she was and would be.

He knelt down by the bedside, heeding Iron-face little, though he nodded friendly to him, and he held his face close to hers; but she had her eyes shut and did not open them till he had

been there a little while; and then they opened and fixed themselves on his without surprise or change. Then she lifted her right hand (for it was in her left shoulder and side that she had been hurt) and slowly laid it on his head, and drew his face to hers and kissed it fondly, as she both smiled and let the tears run over from her eyes. Then she spake in a weak voice:

‘Thou seest, chieftain and dear friend, that I may not stand by thy victorious side to-day. And now, though I were fain if thou wouldst never leave me, yet needs must thou go about thy work, since thou art become the Alderman of the Folk of Silver-dale. Yea, and even if thou wert not to go from me, yet in a manner should I go from thee. For I am grievously hurt, and I know by myself, and also the leeches have told me, that the fever is a-coming on me; so that presently I shall not know thee, but may deem thee to be a woman, or a hound, or the very Wolf that is the image of the Father of thy kindred; or even, it may be, someone else—that I have played with time ago.’

Her voice faltered and faded out here, and she was silent a while; then she said:

‘So depart, kind friend and dear love, bearing this word with thee, that should I die, I call on Iron-face my kinsman to bear witness that I bid thee carry me to bale in Silver-dale, and lay mine ashes with the ashes of thy Fathers, with whom thine own shall mingle at the last, since I have been of the warriors who have helped to bring thee aback to the land of thy folk.’

Then she smiled and shut her eyes and said: ‘And if I live, as indeed I hope, and how glad and glad I shall be to live, then shalt thou bring me to thy house and thy bed, that I may not depart from thee while both our lives last.’

And she opened her eyes and looked at him; and he might not speak for a while, so ravished as he was betwixt joy and sorrow. But the Alderman arose and took a gold ring from off his arm, and spake:

‘This is the gold ring of the God of the Face, and I bear it on mine arm betwixt the Folk and the God in all man-motes, and I bore it through the battle to-day; and it is as holy a ring as may be; and since ye are plighting troth, and I am the witness thereof, it were good that ye held this ring together and called the God to witness, who is akin to the God of the Earth, as we all be. Take the ring, Folk-might, for I trust thee; and of all women now alive would I have this woman happy.’

So Folk-might took the ring and thrust his hand through it, and took her hand, and said:

‘Ye Fathers, thou God of the Face, thou Earth-god, thou Warrior, bear witness that my life and my body are plighted to this woman, the Bride of the House of the Steer!’

His face was flushed and bright as he spoke, but as his words ceased he noted how feebly her hand lay in his, and his face fell, and he gazed on her timidly. But she lay quiet, and said softly and slowly:

‘O Fathers of my kindred! O Warrior and God of the Earth! bear witness that I plight my troth to this man, to lie in his grave if I die, and in his bed if I live.’

And she smiled on him again, and then closed her eyes; but opened them presently once more, and said:

‘Dear friend, how fared it with Gold-mane to-day?’

Said Folk-might: ‘So well he did, that none might have done better. He fared in the fight as if he had been our Father the Warrior: he is a great chieftain.’

She said: ‘Wilt thou give him this message from me, that in no wise he forget the oath which he swore upon the finger-ring as it lay on the sundial of the Garden of the Face? And say, moreover, that I am sorry that we shall part, and have between us such breadth of wild-wood and mountain-neck.’

‘Yea, surely will I give thy message,’ said Folk-might; and in his heart he rejoiced, because he heard her speak as if she were sure of life. Then she said faintly:

‘It is now thy work to depart from me, and to do as it behoveth a chieftain of the people and the Alderman of Silver-dale. Depart, lest the leeches chide me: farewell, my dear!’

So he laid his face to hers and kissed her, and rose up and embraced Iron-face, and went his ways without looking back.

But just over the threshold he met old Hall-ward of the House of the Steer, who was at point to enter, and he greeted him kindly. The old man looked on him steadily, and said: ‘To-morrow or the day after I will utter a word to thee, O Chief of the Wolf.’

‘In a good hour,’ said Folk-might, ‘for all thy words are true.’ Therewith he gat him away from the house, and came to Face-of-god, where he sat before the altar of the Crooked Sword;

and now were the chiefs come back from their meat, and were sitting with him; there also were Wood-father and Wood-wont; but Bow-may was with the Sun-beam, who was resting softly in the fair meadow after all the turmoil.

So men made place for Folk-might beside the War-leader, who looked upon his face, and saw that it was sober and unsmiling, but not heavy or moody with grief. So he deemed that all was as well as it might be with the Bride, and with a good heart fell to taking counsel with the others; and kindly and friendly were the redes which they held there, with no gainsaying of man by man, for the whole folk was glad at heart.

So there they ordered all matters duly for that present time, and by then they had made an end, it was past sunset, and men were lodged in the chief houses about the Market-stead.

Albeit, though they ate their meat with all joy of heart, and were merry in converse one with the other, the men of the Wolf would by no means feast in their Hall again till it had been cleansed and hallowed anew.

CHAPTER LI. THE DEAD BORNE TO BALE: THE MOTE-HOUSE RE-HALLOWED.

On the morrow they bore to bale their slain men, and there withal what was left of the bodies of the four chieftains of the Great Undoing. They brought them into a most fair meadow to the west of Silver-stead, where they had piled up a very great bale for the burning. In that meadow was the Doom-ring and Thing-stead of the Folk of the Wolf, and they had hallowed it when they had first conquered Silver-dale, and it was deemed far holier than the Mote-house aforesaid, wherein the men of the kindred might hold no due court; but rather it was a Feast-hall, and a house where men had converse together, and wherein precious things and tokens of the Fathers were stored up.

The Thing-stead in the meadow was flowery and well-grassed, and a little stream winding about thereby nearly cast a ring around it; and beyond the stream was a full fair grove of oak-trees, very tall and ancient. There then they burned the dead of the Host, wrapped about in exceeding fair raiment. And when the ashes were gathered, the men of Burgdale and the Shepherds left those of their folk for the kindred to bury there in Silver-dale; for they said that they had a right to claim such guesting for them that had helped to win back the Dale.

But when the Burning was done and the bale quenched, and the ashes gathered and buried (and that was on the morrow), then men bore forth the Banners of the Jaws of the Wolf, and the Red Hand, and the Silver Arm, and the Golden Bushel, and the Ragged Sword, and the Wolf of the Woodland; and with great joy and triumph they brought them into the Mote-house and hung them up over the daïs; and they kindled fire on the Holy Hearth by holding up a disk of bright glass to the sun; and then they sang before the banners. And this is somewhat of the song that they sang before them:

Why are ye wending? O whence and whither?
 What shineth over the fallow swords?
 What is the joy that ye bear in hither?
 What is the tale of your blended words?
 No whither we wend, but here have we stayed us,
 Here by the ancient Holy Hearth;
 Long have the moons and the years delayed us,
 But here are we come from the heart of the dearth.
 We are the men of joy belated;
 We are the wanderers over the waste;
 We are but they that sat and waited,
 Watching the empty winds make haste.
 Long, long we sat and knew no others,
 Save alien folk and the foes of the road;
 Till late and at last we met our brothers,
 And needs must we to the old abode.
 For once on a day they prayed for guesting;
 And how were we then their bede to do?
 Wild was the waste for the people's resting,
 And deep the wealth of the Dale we knew.
 Here were the boards that we must spread them
 Down in the fruitful Dale and dear;
 Here were the halls where we would bed them:
 And how should we tarry elsewhere?
 Over the waste we came together:
 There was the tangle athwart the way;
 There was the wind-storm and the weather;
 The red rain darkened down the day.

But that day of the days what grief should let us,
 When we saw through the clouds the dale-glad sun?
 We tore at the tangle that beset us,
 And stood at peace when the day was done.
 Hall of the Happy, take our greeting!
 Bid thou the Fathers come and see
 The Folk-signs on thy walls a-meeting,
 And deem to-day what men we be.
 Look on the Holy Hearth new-litten,
 How the sparks fly twinkling up aloof!
 How the wavering smoke by the sunlight smitten,
 Curls up around the beam-rich roof!
 For here once more is the Wolf abiding,
 Nor ever more from the Dale shall wend,
 And never again his head be hiding,
 Till all days be dark and the world have end.

CHAPTER LII. OF THE NEW BEGINNING OF GOOD DAYS IN SILVER-DALE.

On the third day there was high-tide and great joy amongst all men from end to end of the Dale; and the delivered thralls were feasted and made much of by the kindreds, so that they scarce knew how to believe their own five senses that told them the good tidings.

For none strove to grieve them and torment them; what they would, that did they, and they had all things plenteously; since for all was there enough and to spare of goods stored up for the Dusky Men, as corn and wine and oil and spices, and raiment and silver. Horses were there also, and neat and sheep and swine in abundance. Withal there was the good and dear land; the waxing corn on the acres; the blossoming vines on the hillside; and about the orchards and alongside the ways, the plum-trees and cherry-trees and pear-trees that had cast their blossom and were overhung with little young fruit; and the fair apple-trees a-blossoming, and the chestnuts spreading their boughs from their twisted trunks over the green grass. And there was the goodly pasture for the horses and the neat, and the thymy hill-grass for the sheep; and beyond it all, the thicket of the great wood, with its unfailing store of goodly timber of ash and oak and holly and yoke-elm. There need no man lack unless man compelled him, and all was rich enough and wide enough for the waxing of a very great folk.

Now, therefore, men betook them to what was their own before the coming of the Dusky Men; and though at first many of the delivered thrall-folk feasted somewhat above measure, and though there were some of them who were not very brisk at working on the earth for their livelihood; yet were the most part of them quick of wit and deft of hand, and they mostly fell to presently at their cunning, both of husbandry and handicraft. Moreover, they had great love of the kindreds, and especially of the Woodlanders, and strove to do all things that might pleasure them. And as for those who were dull and listless because of their many torments of the last ten years, they would at least fetch and carry willingly for them of the kindreds; and these last grudged them not meat and raiment and house-room, even if they wrought but little for it, because they called to mind the evil days of their thralldom, and bethought them how few are men's days upon the earth.

Thus all things throve in Silver-dale, and the days wore on toward the summer, and the Yule-tide rest beyond it, and the years beyond and far beyond the winning of Silver-dale.

CHAPTER LIII. OF THE WORD WHICH HALL-WARD OF THE STEER HAD FOR FOLK-MIGHT.

But of the time then passing, it is to be said that the whole host abode in Silver-dale in great mirth and good liking, till they should hear tidings of Dallach and his company, who had followed hot-foot on the fleers of the Dusky Men. And on the tenth day after the battle, Iron-face and his two sons and Stone-face were sitting about sunset under a great oak-tree by that stream-side which ran through the Mote-stead; there also was Folk-might, somewhat distraught because of his love for the Bride, who was now mending of her hurts. As they sat there in all content they saw folk coming toward them, three in number, and as they drew nigher they saw that it was old Hall-ward of the Steer, and the Sun-beam and Bow-may following him hand in hand.

When they came to the brook Bow-may ran up to the elder to help him over the stepping-stones; which she did as one who loved him, as the old man was stark enough to have waded the water waist-deep. She was no longer in her war-gear, but was clad after her wont of

Shadowy Vale, in nought but a white woollen kirtle. So she stood in the stream beside the stones, and let the swift water ripple up over her ankles, while the elder leaned on her shoulder and looked down upon her kindly. The Sun-beam followed after them, stepping daintily from stone to stone, so that she was a fair sight to see; her face was smiling and happy, and as she stepped forth on to the green grass the colour flushed up in it, but she cast her eyes adown as one somewhat shamefaced.

So the chieftains rose up before the leader of the Steer, and Folk-might went up to him, and greeted him, and took his hand and kissed him on the cheek. And Hall-ward said:

‘Hail to the chiefs of the kindred, and my earthly friends!’

Then Folk-might bade him sit down by him, and all the men sat down again; but the Sun-beam leaned her back against a sapling ash hard by, her feet set close together; and Bow-may went to and fro in short turns, keeping well within ear-shot.

Then said Hall-ward: ‘Folk-might, I have prayed thy kinswoman Bow-may to lead me to thee, that I might speak with thee; and it is good that I find my kinsmen of the Face in thy company; for I would say a word to thee that concerns them somewhat.’

Said Folk-might: ‘Guest, and warrior of the Steer, thy words are ever good; and if this time thou comest to ask aught of me, then shall they be better than good.’

Said Hall-ward: ‘Tell me, Folk-might, hast thou seen my daughter the Bride to-day?’

‘Yea,’ said Folk-might, reddening.

‘What didst thou deem of her state?’ said Hall-ward.

Said Folk-might: ‘Thou knowest thyself that the fever hath left her, and that she is mending.’

Hall-ward said: ‘In a few days belike we shall be wending home to Burgdale: when deemest thou that the Bride may travel, if it were but on a litter?’

Folk-might was silent, and Hall-ward smiled on him and said:

‘Wouldst thou have her tarry, O chief of the Wolf?’

‘So it is,’ said Folk-might, ‘that it might be labour lost for her to journey to Burgdale at present.’

‘Thinkest thou?’ said Hall-ward; ‘hast thou a mind then that if she goeth she shall speedily come back hither?’

‘It has been in my mind,’ said Folk-might, ‘that I should wed her. Wilt thou gainsay it? I pray thee, Iron-face my friend, and ye Stone-face and Hall-face, and thou, Face-of-god, my brother, to lay thy words to mine in this matter.’

Then said Hall-ward stroking his beard: ‘There will be a seat missing in the Hall of the Steer, and a sore lack in the heart of many a man in Burgdale if the Bride come back to us no more. We looked not to lose the maiden by her wedding; for it is no long way betwixt the House of the Steer and the House of the Face. But now, when I arise in the morning and miss her, I shall take my staff and walk down the street of Burgstead; for I shall say, The Maiden hath gone to see Iron-face my friend; she is well in the House of the Face. And then shall I remember how that the wood and the wastes lie between us. How sayest thou, Alderman?’

‘A sore lack it will be,’ said Iron-face; ‘but all good go with her! Though whiles shall I go hatless down Burgstead street, and say, Now will I go fetch my daughter the Bride from the House of the Steer; while many a day’s journey shall lie betwixt us.’

Said Hall-ward: ‘I will not beat about the bush, Folk-might; what gift wilt thou give us for the maiden?’

Said Folk-might: ‘Whatever is mine shall be thine; and whatsoever of the Dale the kindred and the poor folk begrudge thee not, that shalt thou have; and deemest thou that they will begrudge thee aught? Is it enough?’

Hall-ward said: ‘I wot not, chieftain; see thou to it! Bow-may, my friend, bring hither that which I would have from Silver-dale for the House of the Steer in payment for our maiden.’

Then Bow-may came forward speedily, and went up to the Sun-beam, and led her by the hand in front of Folk-might and Hall-ward and the other chieftains. Then Folk-might started, and leapt up from the ground; for, sooth to say, he had been thinking so wholly of the Bride, that his sister was not in his mind, and he had had no deeming of whither Hall-ward was coming, though the others guessed well enough, and now smiled on him merrily, when they saw how wild Folk-might stared. As for the Sun-beam, she stood there blushing like a rose in June, but looking her brother straight in the face, as Hall-ward said:

'Folk-might, chief of the Wolf, since thou wouldst take our maiden the Bride away from us, I ask thee to make good her place with this maiden; so that the House of the Steer may not lack, when they who are wont to wed therein come to us and pray us for a bedfellow for the best of their kindred.'

Then became Folk-might smiling and merry like unto the others, and he said: 'Chief of the Steer, this gift is thine, together with aught else which thou mayst desire of us.'

Then he kissed the Sun-beam, and said: 'Sister, we looked for this to befall in some fashion. Yet we deemed that he that should lead thee away might abide with us for a moon or two. But now let all this be, since if thou art not to bear children to the kindreds of Silver-dale, yet shalt thou bear them to their friends and fellows. And now choose what gift thou wilt have of us to keep us in thy memory.'

She said: 'The memory of my people shall not fade from me; yet indeed I ask thee for a gift, to wit, Bow-may, and the two sons of Wood-father that are left since Wood-wicked was slain; and belike the elder and his wife will be fain to go with their sons, and ye will not hinder them.'

'Even so shall it be done,' said Folk-might, and he was silent a while, pondering; and then he said:

'Lo you, friends! doth it not seem strange to you that peace sundereth as well as war? Indeed I deem it grievous that ye shall have to miss your well-beloved kinswoman. And for me, I am now grown so used to this woman my sister, though at whiles she hath been masterful with me, that I shall often turn about and think to speak to her, when there lie long days of wood and waste betwixt her voice and mine.'

The Sun-beam laughed in his face, though the tears stood in her eyes, as she said: 'Keep up thine heart, brother; for at least the way is shorter betwixt Burgdale and Silver-dale than betwixt life and death; and the road we shall learn belike.'

Said Hall-face: 'So it is that my brother is no ill woodman, as ye learned last autumn.'

Iron-face smiled, but somewhat sadly; for he beheld Face-of-god, who had no eyes for anyone save the Sun-beam; and no marvel was that, for never had she looked fairer. And forsooth the War-leader was not utterly well-pleased; for he was deeming that there would be delaying of his wedding, now that the Sun-beam was to become a maid of the Steer; and in his mind he half deemed that it would be better if he were to take her by the hand and lead her home through the wild-wood, he and she alone; and she looked on him shyly, as though she had a deeming of his thought. Albeit he knew it might not be, that he, the chosen War-leader, should trouble the peace of the kindred; for he wotted that all this was done for peace' sake.

So Hall-ward stood forth and took the Sun-beam's right hand in his, and said:

'Now do I take this maiden, Sun-beam of the kindred of the Wolf, and lead her into the House of the Steer, to be in all ways one of the maidens of our House, and to wed in the blood wherein we have been wont to wed. Neither from henceforth let anyone say that this woman is not of the blood of the Steer; for we have given her our blood, and she is of us duly and truly.'

Thereafter they talked together merrily for a little, and then turned toward the houses, for the sun was now down; and as they went Iron-face spake to his son, and said:

'Gold-mane, wilt thou verily keep thine oath to wed the fairest woman in the world? By how much is this one fairer than my dear daughter who shall no more dwell in mine house?'

Said Face-of-god: 'Yea, father, I shall keep mine oath; for the Gods, who know much, know that when I swore last Yule I was thinking of the fair woman going yonder beside Hall-ward, and of none other.'

'Ah, son!' said Iron-face, 'why didst thou beguile us? Hadst thou but told us the truth then!'

'Yea, Alderman,' said Face-of-god smiling, 'and how thou wouldst have raged against me then, when thou hast scarce forgiven me now! In sooth, father, I feared to tell you all: I was young; I was one against the world. Yea, yea; and even that was sweet to me, so sorely as I loved her—Hast thou forgotten, father?'

Iron-face smiled, and answered not; and so came they to the house wherein they were guested.

CHAPTER LIV. TIDINGS OF DALLACH: A FOLK-MOTE IN SILVER-DALE.

Three days thereafter came two swift runners from Rose-dale with tidings of Dallach. In all wise had he thriven, and had slain many of the runaways, and had come happily to Rose-dale: therein by the mere shaking of their swords had they all their will; for there were but a few of the Dusky Warriors in the Dale, since the more part had fared to the slaughter in Silverstead. Now therefore had Dallach been made Alderman of Rose-dale; and the Burgdalers who had gone with him should abide the coming thither of the rest of the Burgdale Host, and meantime of their coming should uphold the new Alderman in Rose-dale. Howbeit Dallach sent word that it was not to be doubted but that many of the Dusky Men had escaped to the woods, and should yet be the death of many a mother's son, unless it were well looked to.

And now the more part of the Burgdale men and the Shepherds began to look toward home, albeit some amongst them had not been ill-pleased to abide there yet a while; for life was exceeding soft to them there, though they helped the poor folk gladly in their husbandry. For especially the women of the Dale, of whom many were very goodly, hankered after the fair-faced tall Burgdalers, and were as kind to them as might be. Forsooth not a few, both carles and queens, of the old thrall-folk prayed them of Burgdale to take them home thither, that they might see new things and forget their old torments once for all, yea, even in dreams. The Burgdalers would not gainsay them, and there was no one else to hinder; so that there went with the Burgdale men at their departure hard on five score of the Silver-dale folk who were not of the kindreds.

And now was a great Folk-mote holden in Silver-dale, whereto the Burgdale men and the Shepherds were bidden; and thereat the War-leader gave out the morrow of the morrow for the day of the departure of the Host. There also were the matters of Silver-dale duly ordered: the Men of the Wolf would have had the Woodlanders dwell with them in the fair-built stead, and take to them of the goodly stone houses there what they would; but this they naysaid, choosing rather to dwell in scattered houses, which they built for themselves at the utmost limit of the tillage.

Indeed, the most abode not even there a long while; for they loved the wood and its deeds. So they went forth into the wood, and cleared them space to dwell in, and builded them halls such as they loved, and fell to their old woodland crafts of charcoal-burning and hunting, wherein they throve well. And good for Silver-dale was their abiding there, since they became a sure defence and stout outpost against all foemen. For the rest, wheresoever they dwelt, they were guest-cherishing and blithe, and were well beloved by all people; and they wedded with the other Houses of the Children of the Wolf.

As to the other matters whereof they took rede at this Folk-mote, they had mostly to do with the warding of the Dale, and the learning of the delivered thralls to handle weapons duly. For men deemed it most like that they would have to meet other men of the kindred of the Felons; which indeed fell out as the years wore.

Moreover, Folk-might (by the rede of Stone-face) sent messengers to the Plain and the Cities, unto men whom he knew there, doing them to wit of the tidings of Silver-dale, and how that a peaceful and guest-loving people, having good store of wares, now dwelt therein, so that chapmen might have recourse thither.

Lastly spake Folk-might and said:

'Guests and brothers-in-arms, we have been looking about our new house, which was our old one, and therein we find great store of wares which we need not, and which we can but use if ye use them. Of your kindness therefore we pray you to take of those things what ye can easily carry. And if ye say the way is long, as indeed it is, since ye are bent on going through the wood to Rose-dale, and so on to Burgdale, yet shall we furnish you with beasts to bear your goods, and with such wains as may pass through the woodland ways.'

Then rose up Fox of Upton and said: 'O Folk-might, and ye men of the Wolf, be it known unto you, that if we have done anything for your help in the winning of Silver-dale, we have thus done that we might help ourselves also, so that we might live in peace henceforward, and that we might have your friendship and fellowship therewithal, so that here in Silver-dale might wax a mighty folk who joined unto us should be strong enough to face the whole world. Such are the redes of wise men when they go a-warring. But we have no will to go back home again made rich with your wealth; this hath been far from our thought in this matter.'

And there went up a murmur from all the Burgdalers yeasaying his word.

But Folk-might took up the word again and spake:

‘Men of Burgdale and the Sheepcotes, what ye say is both manly and friendly; yet, since we look to see a road made plain through the woodland betwixt Burgdale and Silver-dale, and that often ye shall face us in the feast-hall, and whiles stand beside us in the fray, we must needs pray you not to shame us by departing empty-handed; for how then may we look upon your faces again? Stone-face, my friend, thou art old and wise; therefore I bid thee to help us herein, and speak for us to thy kindred, that they naysay us not in this matter.’

Then stood up Stone-face and said: ‘Forsooth, friends, Folk-might is in the right herein; for he may look for anger from the wights that come and go betwixt his kindred and the Gods, if they see us faring back giffless through the woods. Moreover, now that ye have seen Silver-dale, ye may wot how rich a land it is of all good things, and able to bring forth enough and to spare. And now meseemeth the Gods love this Folk that shall dwell here; and they shall become a mighty Folk, and a part of our very selves. Therefore let us take the gifts of our friends, and thank them blithely. For surely, as saith Folk-might, henceforth the wood shall become a road betwixt us, and the thicket a halting-place for friends bearing goodwill in their hands.’

When he had spoken, men yeasaid his words and forbore the gifts no longer; and the Folk-mote sundered in all loving-kindness.

CHAPTER LV. DEPARTURE FROM SILVER-DALE.

On morrow of the morrow were the Burgdale men and they of the Shepherds gathered together in the Market-stead early in the morning, and they were all ready for departure; and the men of the Wolf and the Woodlanders, and of the delivered thralls a great many, stood round about them grieving that they must go. There was much talk between the folk of the Dale and the Guests, and many promises were given and taken to come and go betwixt the two Dales. There also were the men of the thrall-folk who were to wend home with the Burgdalers; and they had been stuffed with good things by the men of the kindreds, and were as fain as might be.

As for the Sun-beam, she was somewhat out of herself at first, being eager and restless beyond her wont, and yet at whiles weeping-ripe when she called to mind that she was now leaving all those things, the gain whereof had been a dream to her both waking and sleeping for these years past. But at last, as she stood in the door of the Mote-house, and beheld all the throng of folk happy and friendly, it came over her that she herself had done her full share to bring all this about, and that all those pleasant places of Silver-dale now full of the goodly life of man would be there even as she had striven for them, and that they would be a part of her left behind, though she were dwelling elsewhere.

Therewithal she said to herself that it was now her part to wield the life of men in Burgdale, and begin once more her days of a chieftain and a swayer of the Folk, and the life of a stirring woman, which the edge of the sword and the need of the hard hand-play had taken out of her hands for a while, making her as a child in the hands of the strong wielders of the blades.

So now she became calm once more, and her face was clad again with the full measure of that majesty of beauty which had once overawed Face-of-god amidst his love of her; and folk beheld her and marvelled at her fairness, and said: ‘She hath an inward sorrow at leaving the fair Dale wherein her Fathers dwelt, and where her mother’s ashes lie in earth.’ Albeit now was her sorrow but little, and much was her hope, and her foresight of days to be; though all the Dale, yea, every leaf and twig of it whereby her feet had ever passed, and each stone of the fair houses, was to her as a picture that she could look on from henceforth for ever.

Of the Bride it is to be said that she was now much mended, and she caused men bear her on a litter out into the Market-place, that she might look on the departure of her folk. She had seen Face-of-god once and again since the Day of Battle, and each time had been kind and blithe with him; and for Iron-face, she loved him so well that she was ever loth to let him depart from her, save when Folk-might was with her.

And now was the Alderman standing beside her, and she said to him: ‘Friend and kinsman, this is the day of departure, and though I must needs abide behind, and am content to abide, yet doth mine heart ache with the sundering; for to-morrow when I wake in the morning there will be no more sending of a messenger to fetch thee to me. Indeed, great hath been the love between me and my people, and nought hath come between us to mar it. Now, kinsman, I would see Gold-mane, my cousin, that I may bid him farewell; for who knoweth if I shall see

him again hereafter?’

Then went Iron-face and found Face-of-god where he was speaking with Folk-might and the chieftains, and said to him:

‘Come quickly, for thy cousin the Bride would speak with thee.’

Face-of-god reddened, and paled afterwards, but he went along with his father silently; and his heart beat as he came and stood before the litter whereas the Bride lay, clad all in white and propped up on fair cushions of red silk. She was frail to look on, and worn and pale yet; but he deemed that she was very happy.

She smiled on him, and reached out her hand and said:

‘Welcome once more, cousin!’ And he held her hand and kissed it, and was nigh weeping, so sore was he beset by a throng of memories concerning her and him in the days when they were little; and he bethought him of her loving-kindness of past days, beyond that of most children, beyond that of most maidens; and how there was nothing in his life but she had a share in it, till the day when he found the Hall on the Mountain.

So he said to her: ‘Kinswoman, is it well with thee?’

‘Yea,’ she said, ‘I am now nigh whole of my hurts.’

He was silent a while; then he said:

‘And otherwise art thou merry at heart?’

‘Yea, indeed,’ said she; ‘yet thou wilt not find it hard to deem that I am sorry of the sundering betwixt me and Burgdale.’

Again was he silent, and said in a while: ‘Dost thou deem that I wrought that sundering?’

She smiled kindly on him and said: ‘Gold-mane, my playmate, thou art become a mighty warrior and a great chief; but thou art not so mighty as that. Many things lay behind the sundering which were neither thou nor I.’

‘Yet,’ said he, ‘it was but such a little time ago that all things seemed so sure; and we—to both of us was the outlook happy.’

‘Let it be happy still,’ she said, ‘now begrudging is gone. Belike the sundering came because we were so sure, and had no defence against the wearing of the days; even as it fareth with a folk that hath no foes.’

He smiled and said: ‘Even as it hath befallen *thy* folk, O Bride, a while ago.’

She reddened, and reached her hand to him, and he took it and held it, and said: ‘Shall I see thee again as the days wear?’

Said she: ‘O chieftain of the Folk, thou shalt have much to do in Burgdale, and the way is long. Yet would I have thee see my children. Forget not the token on my hand which thou holdest. But now get thee to thy folk with no more words; for after all, playmate, the sundering is grievous to me, and I would not spin out the time thereof. Farewell!’

He said no more, but stooped down and kissed her lips, and then turned from her, and took his ways to the head of the Host, and fell to asking and answering, and bidding and arraying; and in a little time was his heart dancing with joy to think of the days that lay before him, wherein now all seemed happy.

So was all arrayed for departure when it lacked three hours of noon. As Folk-might had promised, there were certain light wains drawn by bullocks abiding the departure of the Host, and of sumpter bullocks and horses no few; and all these were laden with fair gifts of the Dale, as silver, and raiment, and weapons. There were many things fair-wrought in the time of the Sorrow, that henceforth should see but little sorrow. Moreover, there was plenty of provision for the way, both meal and wine, and sheep and neat; and all things as fair as might be, and well-arrayed.

It was the Shepherds who were to lead the way; and after them were arrayed the men of the Vine and the Sickle; then they of the Steer, the Bridge, and the Bull; and lastly the House of the Face, with old Stone-face leading them. The Sun-beam was to journey along with the House of the Steer, which had taken her in as a maiden of their blood; and though she had so much liefer have fared with the House of the Face, yet she went meekly as she was bidden, as one who has gotten a great thing, and will make no stir about a small one.

Along with her were Wood-father and Wood-mother, and Wood-wise, now whole of his hurt, and Wood-wont, and Bow-may. Save Bow-may, they were not very joyous; for they were fain of Silver-dale, and it irked them to leave it; moreover, they also had liefer have gone

along with the House of the War-leader.

Last of all went those people of the once thralls of the Dusky Men who had cast in their lot with the Burgdalers, and they were exceeding merry; and especially the women of them, they were chattering like the stares in the autumn evening, when they gather from the fields in the tall elm-trees before they go to roost.

Now all the men of the Dale, both of the kindreds and of the thrall-folk, made way for the Host and its havings, that they might go their ways down the Dale; albeit the Woodlanders clung close to the line of their ancient friends, and with them, as men who were sorry for the sundering, were Wolf-stone and God-swain and Spear-fist. But the chiefs, they drew around Folk-might a little beside the way.

Now Red-coat of Waterless, who had been hurt, and was now whole again, cast his arms about Folk-might and kissed him, and said:

‘All the way hence to Burgdale will I sow with good wishes for thee and thine, and especially for my dear friend God-swain of the Silver Arm; and I would wish and long that they might turn into spells to draw thy feet to usward; for we love thee well.’

In like wise spake other of the Burgdalers; and Folk-might was kind and blithe with them, and he said:

‘Friends, forget ye not that the way is no longer from you to us than it is from us to you. One half of this matter it is for you to deal with.’

‘True is that,’ said Red-beard of the Knolls, ‘but look you, Folk-might, we be but simple husbandmen, and may not often stir from our meadows and acres; even now I bethink me that May is amidst us, and I am beginning to be drawn by the thought of the haysel. Whereas thou—’ (and therewith he reddened) ‘I doubt that thou hast little to do save the work of chieftains, and we know that such work is but little missed if it be undone.’

Thereat Folk-might laughed; and when the others saw that he laughed, they laughed also, else had they foreborne for courtesy’s sake.

But Folk-might answered: ‘Nay, chief of the Sickle, I am not altogether a chieftain, now we have gotten us peace; and somewhat of a husbandman shall I be. Moreover, doubt ye not that I shall do my utmost to behold the fair Dale again; for it is but mountains that meet not.’

Now spake Face-of-god to Folk-might, smiling and somewhat softly, and said: ‘Is all forgiven now, since the day when we first felt each other’s arms?’

‘Yea, all,’ said Folk-might; ‘now hath befallen what I foretold thee in Shadowy Vale, that thou mightest pay for all that had come and gone, if thou wouldest but look to it. Indeed thou wert angry with me for that saying on that eve of Shadowy Vale; but see thou, in those days I was an older man than thou, and might admonish thee somewhat; but now, though but few days have gone over thine head, yet many deeds have abided in thine hand, and thou art much aged. Anger hath left thee, and wisdom hath waxed in thee. As for me, I may now say this word: May the Folk of Burgdale love the Folk of Silver-dale as well as I love thee; then shall all be well.’

Then Face-of-god cast his arms about him and kissed him, and turned away toward Stone-face and Hall-face his brother, where they stood at the head of the array of the Face; and even therewith came up the Alderman somewhat sad and sober of countenance, and he pushed by the War-leader roughly and would not speak with him.

And now blew up the horns of the Shepherds, and they began to move on amidst the shouting of the men of Silver-dale; yet were there amongst the Woodlanders those who wept when they saw their friends verily departing from them.

But when they of the foremost of the Host were gotten so far forward that the men of the Face could begin to move, lo! there was Redesman with his fiddle amongst the leaders; and he had done a man’s work in the day of battle, and all looked kindly on him. About him on this morn were some who had learned the craft of singing well together, and knew his minstrelsy, and he turned to these and nodded as their array moved on, and he drew his bow across the strings, and straightway they fell a-singing, even as it might be thus:

Back again to the dear Dale where born was the kindred,
 Here wend we all living, and liveth our mirth.
 Here afoot fares our joyance, whatever men hindred,
 Through all wrath of the heavens, all storms of the earth.
 O true, we have left here a part of our treasure,
 The ashes of stout ones, the stems of the shield;
 But the bold lives they spended have sown us new pleasure,

Fair tales for the telling in fold and on field.
 For as oft as we sing of their edges' upheaving,
 When the yellowing windows shine forth o'er the night,
 Their names unforgotten with song interweaving
 Shall draw forth dear drops from the depths of delight.
 Or when down by our feet the grey sickles are lying,
 And behind us is curling the supper-tide smoke,
 No whit shall they grudge us the joyance undying,
 Remembrance of men that put from us the yoke.
 When the huddle of ewes from the fells we have driven,
 And we see down the Dale the grey reach of the roof,
 We shall tell of the gift in the battle-joy given,
 All the fierceness of friends that drave sorrow aloof.
 Once then we lamented, and mourned them departed;
 Once only, no oftener. Henceforth shall we fling
 Their names up aloft, when the merriest hearted
 To the Fathers unseen of our life-days we sing.

Then was there silence in the ranks of men; and many murmured the names of the fallen as they fared on their way from out the Market-place of Silver-stead. Then once more Redesman and his mates took up the song:

Come tell me, O friends, for whom bideth the maiden
 Wet-foot from the river-ford down in the Dale?
 For whom hath the goodwife the ox-waggon laden
 With the babble of children, brown-handed and hale?
 Come tell me for what are the women abiding,
 Till each on the other aweary they lean?
 Is it loitering of evil that thus they are chiding,
 The slow-footed bearers of sorrow unseen?
 Nay, yet were they toiling if sorrow had worn them,
 Or hushed had they bided with lips parched and wan.
 The birds of the air other tidings have borne them—
 How glad through the wood goeth man beside man.
 Then fare forth, O valiant, and loiter no longer
 Than the cry of the cuckoo when May is at hand;
 Late waxeth the spring-tide, and daylight grows longer,
 And nightly the star-street hangs high o'er the land.
 Many lives, many days for the Dale do ye carry;
 When the Host breaketh out from the thicket unshorn,
 It shall be as the sun that refuseth to tarry
 On the crown of all mornings, the Midsummer morn.

Again the song fell down till they were well on the western way down Silver-dale; and then Redesman handled his fiddle once more, and again the song rose up, and such-like were the words which were borne back into the Market-place of Silver-stead:

And yet what is this, and why fare ye so slowly,
 While our echoing halls of our voices are dumb,
 And abideth unlit the hearth-brand the holy,
 And the feet of the kind fare afield till we come?
 For not yet through the wood and its tangle ye wander;
 Now skirt we no thicket, no path by the mere;
 Far aloof for our feet leads the Dale-road out yonder;
 Full fair is the morning, its doings all clear.
 There is nought now our feet on the highway delaying
 Save the friend's loving-kindness, the sundering of speech;
 The well-willer's word that ends words with the saying,
 The loth to depart while each looketh on each.
 Fare on then, for nought are ye laden with sorrow;
 The love of this land do ye bear with you still.
 In two Dales of the earth for to-day and to-morrow
 Is waxing the oak-tree of peace and good-will.

Thus then they departed from Silver-dale, even as men who were a portion thereof, and had not utterly left it behind. And that night they lay in the wild-wood not very far from the Dale's end; for they went softly, faring amongst so many friends.

CHAPTER LVI. TALK UPON THE WILD-WOOD WAY.

On the morrow morning when they were on their way again Face-of-god left his own folk to go with the House of the Steer a while; and amongst them he fell in with the Sun-beam going along with Bow-may. So they greeted him kindly, and Face-of-god fell into talk with the Sun-beam as they went side by side through a great oak-wood, where for a space was plain green-sward bare of all underwood.

So in their talk he said to her: 'What deemest thou, my speech-friend, concerning our coming back to guest in Silver-dale one day?'

'The way is long,' she said.

'That may hinder us but not stay us,' said Face-of-god.

'That is sooth,' said the Sun-beam.

Said Face-of-god: 'What things shall stay us? Or deemest thou that we shall never see Silver-dale again?'

She smiled: 'Even so I think thou deemest, Gold-mane. But many things shall hinder us besides the long road.'

Said he: 'Yea, and what things?'

'Thinkest thou,' said the Sun-beam, 'that the winning of Silver-stead is the last battle which thou shalt see?'

'Nay,' said he, 'nay.'

'Shall thy Dale—our Dale—be free from all trouble within itself henceforward? Is there a wall built round it to keep out for ever storm, pestilence, and famine, and the waywardness of its own folk?'

'So it is as thou sayest,' quoth Face-of-god, 'and to meet such troubles and overcome them, or to die in strife with them, this is a great part of a man's life.'

'Yea,' she said, 'and hast thou forgotten that thou art now a great chieftain, and that the folk shall look to thee to use thee many days in the year?'

He laughed and said: 'So it is. How many days have gone by since I wandered in the wood last autumn, that the world should have changed so much!'

'Many deeds shall now be in thy days,' she said, 'and each deed as the corn of wheat from which cometh many corns; and a man's days on the earth are not over many.'

'Then farewell, Silver-dale!' said he, waving his hand toward the north. 'War and trouble may bring me back to thee, but it maybe nought else shall. Farewell!'

She looked on him fondly but unsmiling, as he went beside her strong and warrior-like. Three paces from him went Bow-may, barefoot, in her white kirtle, but bearing her bow in her hand; a leash of arrows was in her girdle, her quiver hung at her back, and she was girt with a sword. On the other side went Wood-wont and Wood-wise, lightly clad but weaponed. Wood-mother was riding in an ox-wain just behind them, and Wood-father went beside her bearing an axe. Scattered all about them were the men of the Steer, gaily clad, bearing weapons, so that the oak-wood was bright with them, and the glades merry with their talk and singing and laughter, and before them down the glades went the banner of the Steer, and the White Beast led them the nearest way to Burgdale.

CHAPTER LVII. HOW THE HOST CAME HOME AGAIN.

It was fourteen days before they came to Rose-dale; for they had much baggage with them, and they had no mind to weary themselves, and the wood was nothing loathsome to them, whereas the weather was fair and bright for the more part. They fell in with no mishap by the way. But a score and three of runaways joined themselves to the Host, having watched their goings and wotting that they were not foemen. Of these, some had heard of the overthrow of the Dusky Men in Silver-dale, and others not. The Burgdalers received them all, for it seemed to them no great matter for a score or so of new-comers to the Dale.

But when the Host was come to Rose-dale, they found it fair and lovely; and there they met with those of their folk who had gone with Dallach. But Dallach welcomed the kindreds with great joy, and bade them abide; for he said that they had the less need to hasten, since he had sent messengers into Burgdale to tell men there of the tidings. Albeit they were mostly loth to tarry; yet when he lay hard on them not to depart as men on the morrow of a gild-feast, they abode there three days, and were as well guested as might be, and on their departure they were laden with gifts from the wealth of Rose-dale by Dallach and his folk.

Before they went their ways Dallach spake with Face-of-god and the chiefs of the Dalesmen, and said:

'Ye have given me much from the time when ye found me in the wood a naked wastrel; yet now I would ask you a gift to lay on the top of all that ye have given me.'

Said Face-of-god: 'Name the gift, and thou shalt have it; for we deem thee our friend.'

'I am no less,' said Dallach, 'as in time to come I may perchance be able to show you. But now I am asking you to suffer a score or two of your men to abide here with me this summer, till I see how this folk new-born again is like to deal with me. For pleasure and a fair life have become so strange to them, that they scarce know what to do with them, or how to live; and unless all is to go awry, I must needs command and forbid; and though belike they love me, yet they fear me not; so that when my commandment pleaseth them, they do as I bid, and when it pleaseth them not, they do contrary to my bidding; for it hath got into their minds that I shall in no case lift a hand against them, which indeed is the very sooth. But your folk they fear as warriors of the world, who have slain the Dusky Men in the Market-place of Silver-stead; and they are of alien blood to them, men who will do as their friend biddeth (think our folk) against them who are neither friends or foes. With such help I shall be well holpen.'

In such wise spake Dallach; and Face-of-god and the chiefs said that so it should be, if men could be found willing to abide in Rose-dale for a while. And when the matter was put abroad, there was no lack of such men amongst the younger warriors, who had noted that the dale was fair amongst dales and its women fairer yet amongst women.

So two score and ten of the Burgdale men abode in Rose-dale, no one of whom was of more than twenty and five winters. Forsooth divers of them set up house in Rose-dale, and never came back to Burgdale, save as guests. For a half score were wedded in Rose-dale before the year's ending; and seven more, who had also taken to them wives of the goodliest of the Rose-dale women, betook them the next spring to the Burg of the Runaways, and there built them a stead, and drew a garth about it, and dug and sowed the banks of the river, which they called Inglebourne. And as years passed, this same stead throve exceedingly, and men resorted thither both from Rose-dale and Burgdale; for it was a pleasant place; and the land, when it was cured, was sweet and good, and the wood thereabout was full of deer of all kinds. So their stead was called Inglebourne after the stream; and in latter days it became a very goodly habitation of men.

Moreover, some of the once-enthralled folk of Rose-dale, when they knew that men of their kindred from Silver-dale were going home with the men of Burgdale to dwell in the Dale, prayed hard to go along with them; for they looked on the Burgdalers as if they were new Gods of the Earth. The Burgdale chiefs would not gainsay these men either, but took with them three score and ten from Rose-dale, men and women, and promised them dwelling and livelihood in Burgdale.

So now with good hearts the Host of Burgdale turned their faces toward their well-beloved Dale; and they made good diligence, so that in three days' time they were come anigh the edge of the woodland wilderness. Thither in the even-tide, as they were making ready for their last supper and bed in the wood, came three men and two women of their folk, who had been abiding their coming ever since they had had the tidings of Silver-dale and the battles from Dallach. Great was the joy of these messengers as they went from company to company of the warriors, and saw the familiar faces of their friends, and heard their wonted voices telling all the story of battle and slaughter. And for their part the men of the Host feasted these stay-at-homes, and made much of them. But one of them, a man of the House of the Face, left the Host a little after nightfall, and bore back to Burgstead at once the tidings of the coming home of the Host. Albeit since Dallach's tidings of victory had come to the Dale, the dwellers in the steads of the country-side had left Burgstead and gone home to their own houses; so that there was no great multitude abiding in the Thorp.

So early on the morrow was the Host astir; but ere they came to Wildlake's Way, the Shepherd-folk turned aside westward to go home, after they had bidden farewell to their friends and fellows of the Dale; for their souls longed for the sheepecotes in the winding valleys under the long grey downs; and the garths where the last year's ricks shouldered up against the old stone gables, and where the daws were busy in the tall unfrequent ash-trees; and the green flowery meadows adown along the bright streams, where the crowfoot and the paigles were blooming now, and the harebells were in flower about the thorn-bushes at the down's foot, whence went the savour of their blossom over sheep-walk and water-meadow.

So these went their ways with many kind words; and two hours afterwards all the rest of the Host stood on the level ground of the Portway; but presently were the ranks of war disordered and broken up by the joy of the women and children, as they fell to drawing goodman or brother or lover out of the throng to the way that led speediest to their homesteads and halls. For the War-leader would not hold the Host together any longer, but suffered each man to go to his home, deeming that the men of Burgstead, and chiefly they of the Face and the

Steer, would suffice for a company if any need were, and they would be easily gathered to meet any hap.

So now the men of the Middle and Lower Dale made for their houses by the road and the lanes and the meadows, and the men of the Upper Dale and Burgstead went their ways along the Portway toward their halls, with the throng of women and children that had come out to meet them. And now men came home when it was yet early, and the long day lay before them; and it was, as it were, made giddy and cumbered with the exceeding joy of return, and the thought of the day when the fear of death and sundering had been ever in their hearts. For these new hours were full of the kissing and embracing of lovers, and the sweetness of renewed delight in beholding the fair bodies so sorely desired, and hearkening the soft wheedling of longed-for voices. There were the cups of friends beneath the chestnut trees, and the talk of the deeds of the fighting-men, and of the heavy days of the home-abiders; many a tale told oft and o'er again. There was the singing of old songs and of new, and the beholding the well-loved nook of the pleasant places, which death might well have made nought for them; and they were sweet with the fear of that which was past, and in their pleasantness was fresh promise for the days to come.

So amid their joyance came evening and nightfall; and though folk were weary with the fullness of delight, yet now for many their weariness led them to the chamber of love before the rest of deep night came to them to make them strong for the happy life to be begun again on the morrow.

House by house they feasted, and few were the lovers that sat not together that even. But Face-of-god and the Sun-beam parted at the door of the House of the Face; for needs must she go with her new folk to the House of the Steer, and needs must Face-of-god be amongst his own folk in that hour of high-tide, and sit beside his father beneath the image of the God with the ray-begirt head.

CHAPTER LVIII. HOW THE MAIDEN WARD WAS HELD IN BURGDALE.

Now May was well worn when the Host came home to Burgdale; and on the very morrow of men's home-coming they began to talk eagerly of the Midsummer Weddings, and how the Maiden Ward would be the greatest and fairest of all yet seen, whereas battle and the deliverance from battle stir up the longing and love both of men and maidens; much also men spake of the wedding of Face-of-god and the Sun-beam; and needs must their wedding abide to the time of the Maiden Ward at Midsummer, and needs also must the Sun-beam go on the Ward with the other Brides of the Folk. So then must Face-of-god keep his soul in patience till those few days were over, doing what work came to hand; and he held his head high among the people, and was well looked to of every man.

In all matters the Sun-beam helped him, both in doing and in forbearing; and now so wonderful and rare was her beauty, that folk looked on her with somewhat of fear, as though she came from the very folk of the Gods.

Indeed she seemed somewhat changed from what she had been of late; she was sober of demeanour during these last days of her maidenhood, and sat amongst the kindred as one communing with herself: of few words she was and little laughter; but her face clear, not overcast by any gloom or shaken by passion: soft and kind was she in converse with others, and sweet were the smiles that came into her face if others' faces seemed to crave for them. For it must be said that as some folk eat out their hearts with fear of the coming evils, even so was she feeding her soul with the joy of the days to be, whatever trouble might fall upon them, whereof belike she foreboded some.

So wore the days toward Midsummer, when the wheat was getting past the blossoming, and the grass in the mown fields was growing deep green again after the shearing of the scythe; when the leaves were most and biggest; when the roses were beginning to fall; when the apples were reddening, and the skins of the grape-berries gathering bloom. High aloft floated the light clouds over the Dale; deep blue showed the distant fells below the ice-mountains; the waters dwindled; all things sought the shadow by daytime, and the twilight of even and the twilight of dawn were but sundered by three hours of half-dark night.

So in the bright forenoon were seventeen brides assembled in the Gate of Burgstead (but of the rest of the Dale were twenty and three looked for), and with these was the Sun-beam, her face as calm as the mountain lake under a summer sunset, while of the others many were

restless, and babbling like April throistles; and not a few talked to her eagerly, and in their restless love of her dragged her about hither and thither.

No men were to be seen that morning; for such was the custom, that the carles either departed to the fields and the acres, or abode within doors on the morn of the day of the Maiden Ward; but there was a throng of women about the Gate and down the street of Burgstead, and it may well be deemed that they kept not silence that hour.

So fared the Brides of Burgstead to the place of the Maiden Ward on the causeway, whereto were come already the other brides from steads up and down the Dale, or were even then close at hand on the way; and among them were Long-coat and her two fellows, with whom Face-of-god had held converse on that morning whereon he had followed his fate to the Mountain.

There then were they gathered under the cliff-wall of the Portway; and by the road-side had their grooms built them up bowers of green boughs to shelter them from the sun's burning, which were thatched with bulrushes, and decked with garlands of the fairest flowers of the meadows and the gardens.

Forsooth they were a lovely sight to look on, for no fairer women might be seen in the world; and the eldest of them was scant of five and twenty winters. Every maiden was clad in as goodly raiment as she might compass; their sleeves and gown-hems and girdles, yea, their very shoes and sandals were embroidered so fairly and closely, that as they shifted in the sun they changed colour like the king-fisher shooting from shadow to sunshine. According to due custom every maiden bore some weapon. A few had bows in their hands and quivers at their backs; some had nought but a sword girt to their sides; some bore slender-shafted spears, so as not to overburden their shapely hands; but to some it seemed a merry game to carry long and heavy thrust-spears, or to bear great war-axes over their shoulders. Most had their flowing hair coiled with bright helms; some had burdened their arms with shields; some bore steel hauberks over their linen smocks: almost all had some piece of war-gear on their bodies; and one, to wit, Steed-linden of the Sickel, a tall and fair damsel, was so arrayed that no garment could be seen on her but bright steel war-gear.

As for the Sun-beam, she was clad in a white kirtle embroidered from throat to hem with work of green boughs and flowers of the goodliest fashion, and a garland of roses on her head. Dale-warden himself was girt to her side by a girdle fair-wrought of golden wire, and she bore no other weapon or war-gear; and she let him lie quiet in his scabbard, nor touched the hilts once; whereas some of the other damsels would be ever drawing their swords out and thrusting them back. But all noted that goodly weapon, the yoke-fellow of so many great deeds.

There then on the Portway, between the water and the rock-wall, rose up plenteous and gleeful talk of clear voices shrill and soft; and whiles the maidens sang, and whiles they told tales of old days, and whiles they joined hands and danced together on the sweet summer dust of the highway. Then they mostly grew aweary, and sat down on the banks of the road or under their leafy bowers.

Noon came, and therewithal goodwives of the neighbouring Dale, who brought them meat and drink, and fruit and fresh flowers from the teeming gardens; and thereafter for a while they nursed their joy in their bosoms, and spake but little and softly while the day was at its hottest in the early afternoon.

Then came out of Burgstead men making semblance of chapmen with a wain bearing wares, and they made as though they were wending down the Portway westward to go out of the Dale. Then arose the weaponed maidens and barred the way to them, and turned them back amidst fresh-springing merriment.

Again in a while, when the sun was westering and the shadows growing long, came herdsmen from down the Dale driving neat, and making as though they would pass by into Burgstead, but to them also did the maidens gainsay the road, so that needs must they turn back amidst laughter and mockery, they themselves also laughing and mocking.

And so at last, when the maidens had been all alone a while, and it was now hard on sunset, they drew together and stood in a ring, and fell to singing; and one Gold-may of the House of the Bridge, a most sweet singer, stood amidst their ring and led them. And this is somewhat of the meaning of their words:

The sun will not tarry; now changeth the light,
Fail the colours that marry the Day to the Night.
Amid the sun's burning bright weapons we bore,

For this eve of our earning comes once and no more.
 For to-day hath no brother in yesterday's tide,
 And to-morrow no other alike it doth hide.
 This day is the token of oath and behest
 That ne'er shall be broken through ill days and best.
 Here the troth hath been given, the oath hath been done,
 To the Folk that hath thriven well under the sun.
 And the gifts of its giving our troth-day shall win
 Are the Dale for our living and dear days therein.
 O Sun, now thou wanest! yet come back and see
 Amidst all that thou gainest how gainful are we.
 O witness of sorrow wide over the earth,
 Rise up on the morrow to look on our mirth!
 Thy blooms art thou bringing back ever for men,
 And thy birds are a-singing each summer again.
 But to men little-hearted what winter is worse
 Than thy summers departed that bore them the curse?
 And e'en such art thou knowing where thriveth the year,
 And good is all growing save thralldom and fear.
 Nought such be our lovers' hearts drawing anigh,
 While yet thy light hovers aloft in the sky.
 Lo the seeker, the finder of Death in the Blade!
 What lips shall be kinder on lips of mine laid?
 La he that hath driven back tribes of the South!
 Sweet-breathed is thine even, but sweeter his mouth.
 Come back from the sea then, O sun! come aback,
 Look adown, look on me then, and ask what I lack!
 Come many a morrow to gaze on the Dale,
 And if e'er thou seest sorrow remember its tale!
 For 'twill be of a story to tell how men died
 In the garnering of glory that no man may hide.
 O sun sinking under! O fragrance of earth!
 O heart! O the wonder whence longing has birth!

So they sang, and the sun sank indeed; and amidst their singing the eve was still about them, though there came a happy murmur from the face of the meadows and the houses of the Thorp aloof. But as their song fell they heard the sound of footsteps a many on the road; so they turned and stood with beating hearts in such order as when a band of the valiant draw together to meet many foes coming on them from all sides, and they stand back to back to face all comers. And even therewith, their raiment gleaming amidst the gathering dusk, came on them the young men of the Dale newly delivered from the grief of war.

Then in very deed the fierce mouths of the raisers of the war-shout were kind on the faces of tender maidens. Then went spear and axe and helm and shield clattering to the earth, as the arms of the new-comers went round about the bodies of the Brides, weary with the long day of sunshine, and glee and loving speech, and the maidens suffered the young men to lead them whither they would, and twilight began to draw round about them as the Maiden Band was sundered.

Some, they were led away westward down the Portway to the homesteads thereabout; and for divers of these the way was long to their halls, and they would have to wend over long stretches of dewy meadows, and hear the night-wind whisper in many a tree, and see the east begin to lighten with the dawn before they came to the lighted feast that awaited them. But some turned up the Portway straight towards Burgstead; and short was their road to the halls where even now the lights were being kindled for their greeting.

As for the Sun-beam, she had been very quiet the day long, speaking as little as she might do, laughing not at all, and smiling for kindness' sake rather than for merriment; and when the grooms came seeking their maidens, she withdrew herself from the band, and stood alone amidst the road nigher to Burgstead than they; and her heart beat hard, and her breath came short and quick, as though fear had caught her in its grip; and indeed for one moment of time she feared that he was not coming to her. For he had gone with the other grooms to that gathered band, and had passed from one to the other, not finding her, till he had got him through the whole company, and beheld her awaiting him. Then indeed he bounded toward her, and caught her by the hands, and then by the shoulders, and drew her to him, and she nothing loth; and in that while he said to her:

'Come then, my friend; lo thou! they go each their own way toward the halls of their houses; and for thee have I chosen a way—a way over the foot-bridge yonder, and over the dewy meadows on this best even of the year.'

‘Nay, nay,’ she said, ‘it may not be. Surely the Burgstead grooms look to thee to lead them to the gate; and surely in the House of the Face they look to see thee before any other. Nay, Gold-mane, my dear, we must needs go by the Portway.’

He said: ‘We shall be home but a very little while after the first, for the way I tell of is as short as the Portway. But hearken, my sweet! When we are in the meadows we shall sit down for a minute on a bank under the chestnut trees, and thence watch the moon coming up over the southern cliffs. And I shall behold thee in the summer night, and deem that I see all thy beauty; which yet shall make me dumb with wonder when I see it indeed in the house amongst the candles.’

‘O nay,’ she said, ‘by the Portway shall we go; the torch-bearers shall be abiding thee at the gate.’

Spake Face-of-god: ‘Then shall we rise up and wend first through a wide treeless meadow, wherein amidst the night we shall behold the kine moving about like odorous shadows; and through the greyness of the moonlight thou shalt deem that thou seest the pink colour of the eglantine blossoms, so fragrant they are.’

‘O nay,’ she said, ‘but it is meet that we go by the Portway.’

But he said: ‘Then from the wide meadow come we into a close of corn, and then into an orchard-close beyond it. There in the ancient walnut-tree the owl sitteth breathing hard in the night-time; but thou shalt not hear him for the joy of the nightingales singing from the apple-trees of the close. Then from out of the shadowed orchard shall we come into the open town-meadow, and over its daisies shall the moonlight be lying in a grey flood of brightness.’

‘Short is the way across it to the brim of the Weltering Water, and across the water lieth the fair garden of the Face; and I have dight for thee there a little boat to waft us across the night-dark waters, that shall be like wavering flames of white fire where the moon smites them, and like the void of all things where the shadows hang over them. There then shall we be in the garden, beholding how the hall-windows are yellow, and hearkening the sound of the hall-glee borne across the flowers and blending with the voice of the nightingales in the trees. There then shall we go along the grass paths whereby the pinks and the cloves and the lavender are sending forth their fragrance, to cheer us, who faint at the scent of the over-worn roses, and the honey-sweetness of the lilies.’

‘All this is for thee, and for nought but for thee this even; and many a blossom whereof thou knowest nought shall grieve if thy foot tread not thereby to-night; if the path of thy wedding which I have made, be void of thee, on the even of the Chamber of Love.’

‘But lo! at last at the garden’s end is the yew-walk arched over for thee, and thou canst not see whereby to enter it; but I, I know it, and I lead thee into and along the dark tunnel through the moonlight, and thine hand is not weary of mine as we go. But at the end shall we come to a wicket, which shall bring us out by the gable-end of the Hall of the Face. Turn we about its corner then, and there are we blinking on the torches of the torch-bearers, and the candles through the open door, and the hall ablaze with light and full of joyous clamour, like the bale-fire in the dark night kindled on a ness above the sea by fisher-folk remembering the Gods.’

‘O nay,’ she said, ‘but by the Portway must we go; the straightest way to the Gate of Burgstead.’

In vain she spake, and knew not what she said; for even as he was speaking he led her away, and her feet went as her will went, rather than her words; and even as she said that last word she set her foot on the first board of the foot-bridge; and she turned aback one moment, and saw the long line of the rock-wall yet glowing with the last of the sunset of midsummer, while as she turned again, lo! before her the moon just beginning to lift himself above the edge of the southern cliffs, and betwixt her and him all Burgdale, and Face-of-god moreover.

Thus then they crossed the bridge into the green meadows, and through the closes and into the garden of the Face and unto the Hall-door; and other brides and grooms were there before them (for six grooms had brought home brides to the House of the Face); but none deemed it amiss in the War-leader of the folk and the love that had led him. And old Stone-face said: ‘Too many are the rows of bee-skeps in the gardens of the Dale that we should begrudge wayward lovers an hour’s waste of candle-light.’

So at last those twain went up the sun-bright Hall hand in hand in all their loveliness, and up on to the dais, and stood together by the middle seat; and the tumult of the joy of the kindred was hushed for a while as they saw that there was speech in the mouth of the War-leader.

Then he spread his hands abroad before them all and cried out: 'How then have I kept mine oath, whereas I swore on the Holy Boar to wed the fairest woman of the world?'

A mighty shout went rattling about the timbers of the roof in answer to his word; and they that looked up to the gable of the Hall said that they saw the ray-ringed image of the God smile with joy over the gathered folk.

But spake Iron-face unheard amidst the clamour of the Hall: 'How fares it now with my darling and my daughter, who dwelleth amongst strangers in the land beyond the wild-wood?'

CHAPTER LIX. THE BEHEST OF FACE-OF-GOD TO THE BRIDE ACCOMPLISHED: A MOTE-STEAD APPOINTED FOR THE THREE FOLKS, TO WIT, THE MEN OF BURGDAL, THE SHEPHERDS, AND THE CHILDREN OF THE WOLF.

Three years and two months thereafter, three hours after noon in the days of early autumn, came a wain tilted over with precious webs of cloth, and drawn by eight white oxen, into the Market-place of Silver-stead: two score and ten of spearmen of the tallest, clad in goodly war-gear, went beside it, and much people of Silver-dale thronged about them. The wain stayed at the foot of the stair that led up to the door of the Mote-house, and there lighted down therefrom a woman goodly of fashion, with wide grey eyes, and face and hands brown with the sun's burning. She had a helm on her head and a sword girt to her side, and in her arms she bore a yearling child.

And there was come Bow-may with the second man-child born to Face-of-god.

She stayed not amidst the wondering folk, but hastened up the stair, which she had once seen running with the blood of men: the door was open, and she went in and walked straight-way, with the babe in her arms, up the great Hall to the daïs.

There were men on the daïs: amidmost sat Folk-might, little changed since the last day she had seen him, yet fairer, she deemed, than of old time; and her heart went forth to meet the Chieftain of her Folk, and the glad tears started in her eyes and ran down her cheeks as she drew near to him.

By his side sat the Bride, and her also Bow-may deemed to have waxed goodlier. Both she and Folk-might knew Bow-may ere she had gone half the length of the hall; and the Bride rose up in her place and cried out Bow-may's name joyously.

With these were sitting the elders of the Wolf and the Woodlanders, the more part of whom Bow-may knew well.

On the daïs also stood aside a score of men weaponed, and looking as if they were awaiting the word which should send them forth on some errand.

Now stood up Folk-might and said: 'Fair greeting and love to my friend and the daughter of my Folk! How farest thou, Bow-may, best of all friendly women? How fareth my sister, and Face-of-god my brother? and how is it with our friends and helpers in the goodly Dale?'

Said Bow-may: 'It is well both with all those and with me; and my heart laughs to see thee, Folk-might, and to look on the elders of the valiant, and our lovely sister the Bride. But I have a message for thee from Face-of-god: wilt thou that I deliver it here?'

'Yea surely,' said Folk-might, and came forth and took her hand, and kissed her cheeks and her mouth. The Bride also came forth and cast her arms about her, and kissed her; and they led her between them to a seat on the daïs beside Folk-might.

But all men looked on the child in her arms and wondered what it was. But Bow-may took the babe, which was both fair and great, and set it on the knees of the Bride, and said:

'Thus saith Face-of-god: "Friend and kinswoman, well-beloved playmate, the gift which thou badest of me in sorrow do thou now take in joy, and do all the good thou wouldst to the son of thy friend. The ring which I gave thee once in the garden of the Face, give thou to Bow-may, my trusty and well-beloved, in token of the fulfilment of my behest."

Then the Bride kissed Bow-may again, and fell to fondling of the child, which was loth to leave Bow-may.

But she spake again: 'To thee also, Folk-might, I have a message from Face-of-god, who saith: "Mighty warrior, friend and fellow, all things thrive with us, and we are happy. Yet is there a hollow place in our hearts which grieveth us, and only thou and thine may amend it. Though whiles we hear tell of thee, yet we see thee not, and fain were we, might we see thee, and wot if the said tales be true. Wilt thou help us somewhat herein, or wilt thou leave

us all the labour? For sure we be that thou wilt not say that thou rememberest us no more, and that thy love for us is departed." This is his message, Folk-might, and he would have an answer from thee.'

Then laughed Folk-might and said: 'Sister Bow-may, seest thou these weaponed men hereby?'

'Yea,' she said.

Said he: 'These men bear a message with them to Face-of-god my brother. Crow the Shaft-speeder, stand forth and tell thy friend Bow-may the message I have set in thy mouth, every word of it.'

Then Crow stood forth and greeted Bow-may friendly, and said: 'Friend Bow-may, this is the message of our Alderman: "Friend and helper, in the Dale which thou hast given to us do all things thrive; neither are we grown old in three years' wearing, nor are our memories worsened. We long sore to see you and give you guesting in Silver-dale, and one day that shall befall. Meanwhile, know this: that we of the Wolf and the Woodland, mindful of the earth that bore us, and the pit whence we were digged, have a mind to go see Shadowy Vale once in every three years, and there to hold high-tide in the ancient Hall of the Wolf, and sit in the Doom-ring of our Fathers. But since ye have joined yourselves to us in battle, and have given us this Dale, our health and wealth, without price and without reward, we deem you our very brethren, and small shall be our hall-glee, and barren shall our Doom-ring seem to us, unless ye sit there beside us. Come then, that we may rejoice each other by the sight of face and sound of voice; that we may speak together of matters that concern our welfare; so that we three Kindreds may become one Folk. And if this seem good to you, know that we shall be in Shadowy Vale in a half-month's wearing. Grieve us not by forbearing to come." Lo, Bow-may, this is the message, and I have learned it well, for well it pleaseth me to bear it.'

Then said Folk-might: 'What say'st thou to the message, Bow-may?'

'It is good in all ways,' said she, 'but is it timely? May our folk have the message and get to Shadowy Vale, so as to meet you there?'

'Yea surely,' said Folk-might, 'for our kinsmen here shall take the road through Shadowy Vale, and in four days' time they shall be in Burgdale, and as thou wottest, it is scant a two days' journey thence to Shadowy Vale.'

Therewith he turned to those men again, and said: 'Kinsman Crow, depart now, and use all diligence with thy message.'

So the messengers began to stir; but Bow-may cried out: 'Ho! Folk-might, my friend, I perceive thou art little changed from the man I knew in Shadowy Vale, who would have his dinner before the fowl were plucked. For shall I not go back with these thy messengers, so that I also may get all ready to wend to the Mote-house of Shadowy Vale?'

But the Bride looked kindly on her, and laughed and said: 'Sister Bow-may, his meaning is that thou shouldest abide here in Silver-dale till we depart for the Folk-thing, and then go thither with us; and this I also pray thee to do, that thou mayst rejoice the hearts of thine old friends; and also that thou mayst teach me all that I should know concerning this fair child of my brother and my sister.'

And she looked on her so kindly as she caressed the babe, that Bow-may's heart melted, and she cried out:

'Would that I might never depart from the house wherein thou dwellest, O Bride of my Kinsman! And this that thou biddest me is easy and pleasant for me to do. But afterwards I must get me back to Burgdale; for I seem to have left much there that calleth for me.'

'Yea,' said Folk-might, 'and art thou wedded, Bow-may? Shalt thou never bend the yew in battle again?'

Said Bow-may soberly: 'Who knoweth, chieftain? Yea, I am wedded now these two years; and nought I looked for less when I followed those twain through the wild-wood to Burgdale.'

She sighed therewith, and said: 'In all the Dale there is no better man of his hands than my man, nor any goodlier to look on, and he is even that Hart of Highcliff whom thou knowest well, O Bride!'

Said the Bride: 'Thou sayest sooth, there is no better man in the Dale.'

Said Bow-may: 'Sun-beam bade me wed him when he pressed hard upon me.' She stayed awhile, and then said: 'Face-of-god also deemed I should not naysay the man; and now my son by him is of like age to this little one.'

‘Good is thy story,’ said Folk-might; ‘or deemest thou, Bow-may, that such strong and goodly women as thou, and women so kind and friendly, should forbear the wedding and the bringing forth of children? Yea, and we who may even yet have to gather to another field before we die, and fight for life and the goods of life.’

‘Thou sayest well,’ she said; ‘all that hath befallen me is good since the day whereon I loosed shaft from the break of the bent over yonder.’

Therewith she fell a-musing, and made as though she were hearkening to the soft voice of the Bride caressing the new-come baby; but in sooth neither heard nor saw what was going on about her, for her thoughts were in bygone days. Howbeit presently she came to herself again, and fell to asking many questions concerning Silver-dale and the kindred, and those who had once been thralls of the Dusky Men; and they answered all duly, and told her the whole story of the Dale since the Day of the Victory.

So Bow-may and the carles who had come with her abode for that half-month in Silver-dale, guested in all love by the folk thereof, both the kindreds and the poor folk. And Bow-may deemed that the Bride loved Face-of-god’s child little less than her own, whereof she had two, a man and a woman; and thereat was she full of joy, since she knew that Face-of-god and the Sun-beam would be fain thereof.

Thereafter, when the time was come, fared Folk-might and the Bride, and many of the elders and warriors of the Wolf and the Woodland, to Shadowy Vale; and Dallach and the best of Rose-dale went with them, being so bidden; and Bow-may and her following, according to the word of the Bride. And in Shadowy Vale they met Face-of-god and Alderman Iron-face, and the chiefs of Burgdale and the Shepherds, and many others; and great joy there was at the meeting. And the Sun-beam remembered the word which she spoke to Face-of-god when first he came to Shadowy Vale, that she would be wishful to see again the dwelling wherein she had passed through so much joy and sorrow of her younger days. But if anyone were fain of this meeting, the Alderman was glad above all, when he took the Bride once more in his arms, and caressed her whom he had deemed should be a very daughter of his House.

Now telleth the tale of all these kindreds, to wit, the Men of Burgdale and the Sheepcotes; and the Children of the Wolf, and the Woodlanders, and the Men of Rose-dale, that they were friends henceforth, and became as one Folk, for better or worse, in peace and in war, in waning and waxing; and that whatsoever befell them, they ever held Shadowy Vale a holy place, and for long and long after they met there in mid-autumn, and held converse and counsel together.

No more as now telleth the tale of these Kindreds and Folks, but maketh an ending.